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Cassius Dio and the Principate

edited by Christopher Burden-Strevens,
Jesper Majbom Madsen, Antonio Pistellato



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Cassius Dio and the Principate

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Christopher Burden-Strevens, Jesper Majbom Madsen, Antonio Pistellato (edited by)

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Cassius Dio and the Principate

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Introduction

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In the imperial books of his *Roman History* Cassius Dio focuses on individual emperors and their families as well as on imperial institutions. He undertook this significant project not, as Fergus Millar once phrased it, for the simple purpose of carrying on his historical account as long as possible (1964), but rather to develop and promote a political framework for the ideal monarchy, and to theorise autocracy's typical problems and their solutions. As a much-cited article already demonstrated decades ago (Pelling 1997), it is clear that Dio's was not simply an annalistic history to be conducted year-on-year until its author ran out of steam. A distinctive aspect of the *Roman History* is that it is an historiographical account strongly intertwined with biographical elements, which structures the narrative around the lifespan of the *princeps*. The historian evidently began to experiment with that change of structure at a relatively early stage before the Imperial narrative, beginning with the extra-legal dynasts (*dynasteiai*) of the Late Republic which laid the foundations of the Principate. This introduces a tension into Dio's narrative structure, which creates a unique sense of the past and allows us to see Roman history through a specific lens: the viewpoint of a man who witnessed the Principate from the Antonines to the Severans. By the time of Dio's writing the Principate was a full-fledged historical fact: it had experienced more than two hundred years of history, good and

bad emperors, and three major civil wars (68-69, 194, and 197). It is, therefore, perhaps better to see the historian not as an “adherent” or “advocate” of monarchy – in Adam Kemezis’ own words, monarchy had long ceased to be something that one was for or against (Kemezis 2014) –, but rather as a *theorist* of its development and execution.

This collection of seven essays sets out to address these questions. It is the result of a seminar held in Nyborg in January 2018 organized by Jesper M. Madsen within the scope of the *Cassius Dio: Between History and Politics* network (2014-2018). This collaboration, under the aegis of the Danish Council for Independent Research, has published numerous collective studies of the results of its findings into the historian’s intellectual and political thought, the aims and methods of his work, and its socio-political context. As a result of these efforts, it is now more firmly established that one of Dio’s objectives throughout the *Roman History* was to demonstrate that only a monarchical form of government, in its right form and with the right kind of monarch, would ensure the stability to maintain Rome’s dominant position in the known world. This leads Dio towards a political analysis, according to which the civil wars following the death of Caesar – though traumatic, as fighting between fellow citizens always is – was ultimately necessary to change Rome’s political culture for the better. Also, Dio’s ideal emperor was a man of experience and proven military and political credentials; he was a member of the Senate and was to be chosen among the best qualified senators by the emperor in power without interference from his peers. Picking up these themes with specific reference to the Principate, this collection focuses in particular on political institutions and the government of the Principate, including its honour-system, the relationship between the emperor and the Senate, the army and the emperor, as well as the different ruling family dynasties. It explores how these facets make Dio reflect on periods of prosperity and decline, and aims to shed light on his political agenda. Through his own eyes – and often those of a contemporary eyewitness to the events described – Cassius Dio furnishes us with a distinctive interpretation of his time and the issues which most concerned (or plagued) it: the Imperial narrative is consequently a mirror to the historian’s own interpretative thought. This collection explores the underlying structural elements of imperial society, the individuality of emperors, and the relationship between institutions and individuals as seen by our historian.

Nevertheless, the issues of imperial Rome as they emerge in Dio’s work require a deeper analysis that includes also the Republican books of the *Roman History*. Recent work has emphasized the need to approach Dio’s text not as a series of discrete ‘sections’ but instead as a coherent work – a unified whole whose importance can only be appreciated by reading it in its textual and contextual entirety (e.g. Burden-Strevens, Lindholmer 2019). On this view, our understanding

of the *Roman History*, its message and its impact, can only be complete by looking across periods. To appreciate the Imperial narrative, we need the books which cover the Late Republic; for the Late Republic, we need to consider also the framework laid out in the books devoted to the birth and infancy of the Republic; and to gauge the programmatic function of the first books on Rome's earliest mythohistory, we must naturally know the story of the *Roman History* to its end. Accordingly, we here focus not only on the Imperial period but also selected aspects of Dio's treatment of the Republic. The two forms of government of the Roman state, Republic and Principate, are intertwined to such an extent that Dio's own historiographical design cannot be understood in full without considering them as a continuum rather than as separate entities. Of course this was exactly the wish of Augustus when he created the Principate after the end of the civil war. We know that facts make them different in substance, but formal continuity is an essential landmark.

We then have the slippery issue of Dio's terminology. This question is complex, and not only in those cases when we can see clearly the historian translating Latin words into Greek. The question of terminology is, in general terms, quite fundamental for anyone studying Roman history through its sources; but it becomes an inescapable challenge when Greek sources translate Latin words. As Nicolet put it forty years ago, "toute approche historique de la vie politique romaine achoppe sur des problèmes de lexicographie" (1980, 25). This assumption remains true even when aspects of Dio's vocabulary have already benefitted from some study, for example the work of Freyburger-Galland (1997) and the more recent contributions by Coudry (2016) and others. The problem is that Dio's terminology sometimes requires special and deeper analysis; this is sometimes lacking in Freyburger-Galland's lexical review. One example is the word δημοκρατία, a recurrent theme in this volume. Despite its profound importance for the development of Greek historiography in general, δημοκρατία remained a remarkably ambiguous term when applied to Roman history from the moment it was first used to describe the system by Polybius (6.11.2; cf. Nicolet 1980, 39-40; further in Nicolet 1973).

What does δημοκρατία *exactly* mean in Dio's work? The word is typically translated into English as "Republic". This is how modern scholars and students usually term the period that followed the 'founding' monarchy and preceded the Principate, if we follow the periodization commonly adopted in handbooks of Roman history. In the *Roman History*, however, δημοκρατία is regularly presented in direct opposition with μοναρχία, which in turn does not indicate the founding monarchy we find in the handbooks, but rather the Principate; Dio systematically calls the monarchy of the early kings a βασιλεία, not μοναρχία. In addition to this schema, experts in Dio will already be aware that between δημοκρατία and μοναρχία he inserts a third pe-

riod, a novelty in ancient historiography: that of the *δυναστεΐαι*, the “age of potentates” or “age of dynasts” – a term used to characterise the extra-legal dominion wielded by the triumvirs which caused the final crisis of the *δημοκρατία* (famously, 52.1.1; see most importantly Kemezis 2014 on Dio’s “*dynasteia* mode”). Dio’s diachronic sequence is thus *βασιλεία*, *δημοκρατία*, *δυναστεΐαι*, *μοναρχία* (cf. also Fromentin 2013 for this sequence, possibly laid out in the lost preface of the *Roman History*). This is an essential point of departure.

Bellissime (2016) has provided a recent in-depth analysis of Dio’s consistency in deploying these terms, focusing her study especially on *δημοκρατία* and *μοναρχία*; rightly, she interprets the evolution of Dio’s theory of the latter through the lens of the historian’s experience of his own time of writing, i.e. the first half of the 3rd century CE. Bellissime is certainly right in saying that in Dio “l’opposition entre *δημοκρατία* et *μοναρχία* se résout dans un même refus de la *δυναστεΐα*”; however, her conclusion that the terms *δημοκρατία* and *μοναρχία* “ne sous-entendent ni blâme ni éloge de sa part” must be at least nuanced on a more cautious ground. It is reasonably well established that for Dio *μοναρχία* is much better than *δημοκρατία*.¹ That much is clear from the Agrippa-Maecenas debate in Book 52. The vigorous advocacy and promotion of monarchy as such delivered by Maecenas – who argues that democracy (or republicanism) is unstable and doomed to fail because men cannot share power with their equals without envy and discord – accords entirely with the historian’s own political thought, as expressed in his *propria persona* statements in all portions of the work (Burden-Strevens 2020, 40-52, 121-6). The failings of *δημοκρατία* in Maecenas’ view (and unquestionably the historian’s own) were not only systemic, but inherent in the jealousy and ambition of human nature itself. Only a *princeps*, Dio argues through his Maecenas, could act as a counterpoise to those faults in human nature and so save Rome from itself after a century of *stasis* and civil war.

However, we need to be especially careful when we use the modern term ‘Republic’ as a translation for Dio’s *δημοκρατία*. The way in which we choose to translate his views into our modern languages necessarily alters our understanding of those views significantly, and prudent attention is required for the interpretation of his vocabulary. The modern term ‘Republic’, of course, derives from the Latin phrase *res publica*; yet *res publica* never denoted either ‘The Republic’ as a distinct period of Roman history, nor necessarily indicated the early modern and modern sense of a republic as a democratic or semi-dem-

¹ For the analysis that Dio had also substantial reservations against monarchical rule and against Octavian-Augustus, who introduced the first version of the Principate, see Manuwald 1979, 8-15, 25-26.

ocratic system in which the political elite compete to win power over the executive and the head of state. *Res publica* rather meant ‘the commonwealth’ or ‘the state’; this is the way in which Latin-speaking Romans termed the state irrespective of its form of government. Monarchy, Republic, Triumvirate, Principate, and even – to go beyond Dio’s own time – Dominate were *all*, one and the same, ‘the *res publica*’ to Latin-speaking Romans. This point is fundamental. In Dio’s work δημοκρατία is therefore used not as a Greek gloss of the Latin *res publica* but rather to denote a very specific political system: the senatorial and consular form of government that developed after the last king of Rome, Tarquinius Superbus, was banned from the city (allegedly c. 509 BCE) and lasted until the outbreak of civil war caused by the δυναστεῖαι. From the Latin-speaking Roman’s point of view, all these changes affected the one and same republic – the state, the *res publica*. The same was true for Dio, who certainly knew Latin, was himself the son of a Roman provincial governor and consul, and served in Rome’s Imperial government and Senate for four decades.

The question that necessarily follows should rightly be this: if Dio takes δημοκρατία to mean the consular and senatorial system of government – the ‘free Republic’, if you will – that existed from the expulsion of the Tarquins to Sulla’s civil war, how, then, does he translate into Greek the crucially important Latin term *res publica*, the one and indivisible commonwealth of the SPQR? Though an obvious question, the answer is unfortunately far from obvious. This was a problem already recognised in the Greek language centuries before his *Roman History*. Already at the time of the inscription of Augustus’ *Res Gestae*, the Greek copies of the *princeps*’ ‘achievements’ (*Res Gestae*) at Ankara and Apollonia clearly evidence a struggle of terminology, translating the phrase *res publica* in various ways. As shown by Cooley (2009, 26), the different Greek copies of the *Res Gestae* may translate the term literally as τὰ κοινὰ πράγματα (1.1) or τὰ δημόσια πράγματα (1.3, 4; 7.1), or more broadly as πατρίς (2).² In one instance, perhaps significantly at the very beginning, the Latin word *res publica* is replaced with a generic Πῶμη (*praef.*). In two instances, the Greek version simply omits the Latin expression altogether rather than translating it (25.1; 34.1). This is a most interesting peculiarity, especially in the light of what we normally know about official epigraphy, which standardized the terminology to be followed with often pedantic levels of precision. Indeed the Latin version is redundant, whereas the Greek is not. How does all this relate to Dio’s *res publica*?

² The latter being a “traduction développée ou libre” as Scheid 2007, xxxii defined it, a heightening of the emotional tone concerning Octavian’s struggle against Brutus and Cassius for Cooley 2009, 26.

Dio himself is ambivalent in translating *res publica* or its cognates – terms which denote the commonwealth or state at large – into Greek. He may sometimes use τὰ κοινά; at other times, πολιτεία or a related expression. Unlike the communities that erected their own Greek texts of the *Res Gestae*, Dio himself does not appear to have been hindered by the need to find a useful expression. It is not the aim of this volume to investigate this specific problem, already noted by Freyburger-Galland (although her study did not propose a solution to this problem; 1997, 43-7).

Nevertheless, this has something to do with Dio's terminology concerning the periodization of the history of Rome, and with his assessment of the different forms of government of the Roman state. The *Roman History* offers a multi-layered perspective of the evolution of the 'constitutional' history of Rome, and Dio's opinion about δημοκρατία seems to evolve in relation to his assessment of μοναρχία. When Dio approaches the Principate by staging the dialogue between Agrippa and Maecenas on the best form of government for the Roman state, he is – as we have already noted – generally negative towards δημοκρατία, and believes that μοναρχία is the only form of constitution that will prevent the immoderation, ambition, and rivalry of human nature causing renewed fragmentation and civil war. However, in his narrative of the Principate the divide between the two forms of government is not neat: indeed, this is intentionally the case, since Dio notes in the necrology of its founder Augustus that the first *princeps* instituted a regime which in fact *combined* the best of the Republic with the best of monarchy: "they were", he writes, "subjects of royalty yet not slaves, and citizens of a democracy, yet without discord" (56.43.4 βασιλευομένους τε ἄνευ δουλείας καὶ δημοκρατουμένους ἄνευ διχοστασίας).

Although the Agrippa-Maecenas debate serves to articulate Dio's belief in the salutary powers of monarchy for Rome and his theory for its best expression, the historian does additionally highlight that δημοκρατία has certain benefits in its ideal form, such as encouraging competitive rivalry in service of the state among the aristocracy. And where δημοκρατία has its positives, μοναρχία has its faults: it is easy, both Agrippa and Maecenas conclude, for a monarch to become a tyrant if he is of poor character or his power left unguided (52.5, 52.15). The very best form of government, Dio concludes, is a tempered μοναρχία in which fundamental elements of δημοκρατία are present: the Senate, first and foremost, must remain as the political body that should use its collective experience and prestige to guide the emperor, and upon which that same emperor depends and draws legitimation.

Accordingly, for Dio the best possible emperor seems to be a ruler who is δημοτικός: this adjective does not mean "democratic", which as we have discussed must be a mistranslation, but rather serves as Dio's direct and consist translation for the Latin term *ciuilis*. In spite of having been long underestimated by scholars – or at least until

recent decades –, *ciuilis* with its kin abstract noun *ciuilitas* was an essential aspect of the senatorial ideology under the Principate, of which Dio is only one exponent. His personal experience of the Antonine and Severan emperors will no doubt have cemented his view, surely already present from the historian's childhood as the son of a Roman senator and provincial governor and shared also by his peers, that the emperor must derive legitimacy from the Senate. Its status and prestige – no longer as an arm of government as such, but rather as the symbolic repository of Rome's dignity and authority – must be respected, and the life, property, and pride of its members protected. Observing these tenets was essential for the *ciuilis princeps*; they provided for Dio a set of political and philosophical principles that formed the framework of his *Roman History*. Nevertheless, the historian's 'senatorialism' is not self-indulgent, nor seeks to arrogate to the Senate practical political powers that had been lost centuries before. Dio never fails to blame 'bad' emperors for humiliating or otherwise mistreating the Senate, but it is equally clear that the inclusion of senators' points of view when decisions were being made was the responsibility of the *princeps* alone. In Dio's outline of the ideal monarchical constitution, there was no mechanism for the Senate to check the emperor's decision – nor could they enact laws on their own initiative. That power rested with the *princeps* alone. The senators were therefore in no position to change the emperor's decision other than by offering their points of view. But such a system required that the emperor listen to their concerns and that he attend Senate meetings, which Dio leads his readers to understand was far from always being the case. Unlike Tacitus' scepticism against those senators who refused to share power with Tiberius, Dio never criticises the Senate for failing to assume political power, not even when Tiberius offered it. Direct rule was no longer a matter for the senators but had to be placed under the firm control of the monarch in power.

A final aspect when dealing with Dio's approach to and assessment of the Principate – and inextricably related to his belief in the importance of having a *ciuilis princeps* – is philosophy. Since no literary genre, including historiography, can be regarded as exempt from the influence of philosophy, the relationship between Dio's *Roman History* and this branch of intellectual thought must also be addressed. In Dio's time, the impact of Stoicism was fueled by the principate of Marcus Aurelius, the Stoic emperor. Did this affect Dio's interpretation of the role of a Roman emperor in the *res publica*? What about the role of the Senate in Dio's Rome, after many years of history of the Principate, with many senatorial victims of tyrannical emperors from Caligula to Commodus, from Didius Julianus to Elagabalus? Did Dio see a possible solution to the pressing issue of a state governed by a single man, whose powers nevertheless depended upon the Senate's decisions? It is our hope that this volume con-

tributes to carve out definitions of these problems perhaps in more thoughtful and more precise terms than has been done so far, which in itself posits a challenge.

The collection begins with Gianpaolo Urso (“‘Ritorno alla monarchia’, tra Cesare e Augusto: le origini del principato in Cassio Dione”), who elaborates on how for Dio there was no continuity between δημοκρατία and μοναρχία. The “Republic” ended between 43 (when the triumvirate between Antony, Octavian and Lepidus was established) and 42 BCE (the Battle of Philippi); the “Monarchy” was established between 29 (when Octavian received the title of *imperator*) and January 27 BCE (when Octavian delivered his famous speech to the Senate and received the title of Augustus). In Dio’s view, however, the founder of the “Monarchy” was not Augustus, but Julius Caesar: his dictatorship was already a means to exert the same monarchic power of his adoptive son. In its inner complexity, such a representation of the transition from δημοκρατία to μοναρχία is consistent with the way in which Dio reconstructs the origins of δημοκρατία in the first books of the *Roman History*, now traceable only through fragments.

Martina Bono (“Teoria politica e scrittura storiografica nei ‘libri imperiali’ della Storia Romana di Cassio Dione”) examines to what extent the political persona of the *princeps* shapes Dio’s imperial narrative. The best fitting passages for investigating this topic are the anecdotal-biographical sections, which cannot be entirely dismissed as elements of imperial biography: it would be better, Bono maintains, to consider those sections as devoted to the assessment of the emperor’s praxis of government on a very concrete (rather than moral) ground. These narrative elements reveal the existence of a well-structured framework lying beneath the Dio’s historiographical building in terms of political thought. In fact, Dio develops a consistent perspective about the relationship he expected between the *princeps* and the Senate, fashioned by the *ciuilis princeps* model. According to Bono, this paradigm is sustained by a very classical political theory, though remoulded: the theory of the ‘mixed constitution’ first propounded in Thucydides and Aristotle, applied to Rome by Polybius, and later adopted in the Roman tradition by Cicero.

Mads O. Lindholmer (“Cassius Dio’s Ideal Government and the Imperial Senate”) sets out to focus on the exact role of the Senate in Dio’s ideal government and its preferable relationship with good emperors. There is a fundamental difference between viewing the Senate as a passive pool of administrative experts, a forum of debate or advice, and an actual governmental partner meant to share responsibilities or even power with the emperor. Attaining a more precise understanding of Dio’s view of the Senate, Lindholmer assumes, would illuminate Dio’s ideal government further as well as the effects of the Severan period on the elite’s perception of this institution. Lindholmer provocatively argues that, in actuality, Dio idealises a minimalist role

for the Senate: in his view, its members function as a pool from which magistrates and advisors should be drawn, but the emperor should hold absolute power and the Senate should not constitute an important forum of genuine deliberation. Instead, in Dio's ideal government, the *consilium* was the key forum of debate informing imperial policy.

Jesper M. Madsen ("Reconstructing the Principate: Dio and the Flavians") explores how in Dio's account of imperial Rome, the Flavian Dynasty represents all aspects of monarchical rule in the age of the empire: they serve as a literary microcosm of the strengths and weakness, the pros and cons, of monarchical rule. The strength is represented with Vespasian, his display of modesty and understanding for the need to cooperate and share power with the senatorial elite. The weakness is described through the nepotism, betrayal, and uncontrolled ambition for glory and prestige that helped Domitian to power and forced the return of tyrannical rule upon the Romans. In this chapter, Madsen discusses how the Flavian narrative serves as a microcosm in the *Roman History* to demonstrate why dynastic succession was incapable of providing the stability needed for monarchical rule to reach its full constitutional and political potential.

Antonio Pistellato ("Δημοκρατεῖσθαι or μοναρχεῖσθαι, That Is the Question: Cassius Dio and the Senatorial Principate") sets out to explore how Dio's account of Caligula's principate pivots on the divide between Caligula's *ciuilis* debut and his later decline into despotism. As Dio reports, the murder of the emperor in 41 CE polarized the Senate on the question of whether to abolish the Principate or to confirm it. Dio's interest in such a crucial passage seems to depend on his own experience of the end of Commodus and the accession of Pertinax in 192/193 CE. Pistellato suggests that the underpinning of Dio's political thought is Stoic, and interestingly coincides with elements of Cicero's *De republica*. When the relationship between the *princeps* and the Senate collapses, the solution is not so much utopian 'republicanism' as a 'civil' – in Dio's own words – spirit, to be intended as a fruitful cooperation between the two or, in the best of all possible worlds, as a senatorial emperor on the throne of Rome.

Christopher V. Noe ("The 'Age of Iron and Rust' in Cassius Dio's *Roman History*: Influences from Stoic Philosophy") discusses the impact of Stoic philosophy on Dio's imperial books. Noe sets out to demonstrate how fundamental Stoic ideas influenced Dio's constitutional discussions and the role of the emperor as in the Agrippa-Maecenas debate in Book 52, and how Dio evaluated political environments as well as political developments in the Empire with inspirations from Stoic logic. Moreover, the chapter argues that the "age of iron and rust" in his contemporary narrative from the emperor Commodus to Caracalla was also fundamentally an 'iron age' on the basis of Stoic values.

Finally, Andrew G. Scott ("Misunderstanding History: Past and Present Cassius Dio's Contemporary Books") demonstrates that what

lies at the heart of Dio's *Roman History* is the charting of changes in government from the early kings to the monarchy established by Augustus, with particular emphasis on the decline of δημοκρατία and the transition to μοναρχία. Throughout Dio's analysis, we observe certain individuals who serve as examples to be emulated or avoided. In Dio's own age, emperors generally misunderstood or misinterpreted, willingly or unwillingly, these examples from the past. These failures, Scott maintains, allow us to consider Dio's understanding of the function of historiography and his ideas about the utility of his own work. While this may lead us to the negative conclusion that Dio believed all forms of government eventually degenerate, it also leaves open the possibility that Dio considered the writing of history, and thus the guarantee of a proper understanding of the past, to have positive, transformative consequences for Rome's μοναρχία.

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Cassius Dio and the Principate

edited by Christopher Burden-Strevens,
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‘Ritorno alla monarchia’, tra Cesare e Augusto: le origini del principato in Cassio Dione

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Abstract For Cassius Dio, there was no continuity between Republic and Principate. The Republic ended between 43 (institution of the triumvirate) and 42 BC (battle of Philippi); the ‘monarchy’ was established between 29 (Octavianus *Imperator*) and 27 (speech to the senators in January). The founder of the imperial monarchy, however, was not Augustus, but Caesar: his dictatorship was already a means to exert the same monarchic power of his adoptive son. In its inner complexity, such a representation of the transition from the Republic to the Principate is consistent with the way Dio reconstructed the origins of the Republic, in the first (lost) books of his *Roman History*.

Keywords Augustus. Cassius Dio. Caesar. Imperator. Monarchy. Ancient Rome.

1

Una trasformazione radicale e improvvisa delle istituzioni è sempre un’impresa azzardata e in fondo impossibile: nella *Storia romana* di Cassio Dione questo tema emerge in diverse occasioni e in particolare in tre passi. Il primo di essi è un frammento del libro 3, il libro che descriveva il ‘primo anno della repubblica’:

Cass. Dio fr. 12.3^a Πᾶσαι μὲν γὰρ μεταβολαὶ σφαλερώταται εἰσι, μάλιστα δὲ αἱ ἐν ταῖς πολιτείαις πλεῖστα διὴ καὶ μέγιστα καὶ ἰδιώτας καὶ πόλεις βλάπτουσι.




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Tutti i cambiamenti sono molto rischiosi, ma soprattutto quelli nelle forme di governo, che provocano danni numerosissimi e grandissimi agli individui e alle città.¹

Il secondo segue immediatamente il dibattito tra Agrippa e Mecenate:

Cass. Dio 52.41.1 Ὁ δὲ δὴ Καῖσαρ [...] τὰ δὲ δὴ τοῦ Μαικίνου μάλλον εἴλετο. Οὐ μέντοι καὶ πάντα εὐθὺς ὥσπερ ὑπετέθειτο ἔπραξε, φοβηθεὶς μὴ καὶ σφαλῇ τι, ἀθρόως μεταρρυθμίσαι τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἐθέλησας.

Cesare² [...] preferì seguire i suggerimenti di Mecenate. Tuttavia non li mise subito tutti in atto, così come gli erano stati proposti, poiché temeva di commettere dei passi falsi se avesse voluto trasformare completamente la comunità.

Il terzo si trova alla fine dell’elogio dell’imperatore Pertinace:

Cass. Dio 74[73].10.3 [Xiph.] Ὁ Περτίναξ [...] οὐδὲ ἔγνω, καίπερ ἐμπειρότατος πραγμάτων ὢν, ὅτι ἀδύνατόν ἐστιν ἀθρόα τινὰ ἀσφαλῶς ἐπανορθοῦσθαι, ἀλλ’ εἴπερ τι ἄλλο, καὶ πολιτικὴ κατάστασις καὶ χρόνου καὶ σοφίας χρήζει.

Pertinace [...] non capì, pur essendo un uomo di vastissima esperienza, che è impossibile realizzare una riforma complessiva senza correre pericoli, ma che soprattutto il riordinamento di uno stato richiede tempo e saggezza.

Che il tema abbia per Dione una particolare rilevanza, lo dimostra il fatto che egli vi accenna in questi tre momenti cruciali della sua opera. Sulla centralità del dibattito tra Agrippa e Mecenate rispetto all’impianto complessivo della *Storia romana* e sull’importanza delle vicende del 193 d.C. (e della figura di Pertinace) rispetto alla sezione ‘contemporanea’ dell’opera dionea, non è il caso di dilungarci.

¹ Qui e *infra*, le traduzioni italiane sono dell’Autore.

² Si tratta ovviamente di Ottaviano. Nelle pagine che seguono utilizzerò la denominazione corrente, che però è impiegata quasi solo da Cicerone (e solo nelle lettere: cf. Simpson 1998, 432-3; Millar 2000, 2). Dione lo chiama come lui si faceva chiamare e come lo chiamavano i suoi contemporanei: dapprima Ὀκτάουιος, quindi soltanto Καῖσαρ, infine Αὐγουστος (cf. 45.5.1, 46.47.7-8). In un solo caso, parlando dell’adozione, Dione fornisce il nome completo (46.47.5: Γάιος Ἰούλιος Καῖσαρ Ὀκταουιανός). Καῖσαρ Ὀκταουιανός è utilizzato solo a 47.20.3, 48.14.5 e 49.41.2, per distinguerlo dal πρότερος Καῖσαρ (così a 49.41.2), citato immediatamente prima.

Ma anche il fr. 12.3^a si inseriva, con ogni probabilità, in un contesto di particolare rilievo. L'analisi dei frammenti conservati³ suggerisce infatti che il libro 3 (o buona parte di esso) contenesse una discussione tra diversi personaggi, sull'organizzazione politica che Roma avrebbe dovuto darsi dopo la caduta di Tarquinio il Superbo.⁴ Il libro 3 era cioè molto simile, come struttura e come funzione, al libro 52. Che già in questo libro Dione (probabilmente non in prima persona, ma per bocca, forse, di Bruto)⁵ esprimesse il suo punto di vista sulle riforme istituzionali, è un chiaro segnale dell'importanza che egli attribuiva a tale problema. Se teniamo presente questo *Leitmotiv*, non è sorprendente che sia la transizione dalla monarchia arcaica alla repubblica, sia quella dalla repubblica al principato (ma Dione direbbe, come vedremo, il 'ritorno alla monarchia') si presentino come eventi complessi, articolati in diversi passaggi.

Dione trattava le origini della repubblica nel libro 3 e nei libri immediatamente successivi, di cui restano frammenti e l'epitome di Zonara. Di questo argomento ho già avuto modo di occuparmi in altre occasioni:⁶ qui vorrei focalizzare la mia attenzione sulle origini del principato (libri 43-52), per poi proporre, alla fine, un breve confronto tra queste due sezioni della *Storia romana*.

2

Verso la fine del libro 43 Dione racconta che nel 45 a.C., dopo la battaglia di Munda, Cesare ricevette l'appellativo di *imperator* (αὐτοκράτωρ). Il significato originario di questa espressione era stato già spiegato da Dione in un passo perduto: all'inizio del lungo *excursus* sul trionfo che chiudeva il racconto della guerra del V-IV secolo tra Roma e Veio (Zonar. 7.21.4-11).⁷ Giunto a parlare di Cesare, Dione precisa che nel 43 il termine *imperator* venne utilizzato con un significato nuovo:

Cass. Dio 43.44.2-4 Τό τε τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος ὄνομα οὐ κατὰ τὸ ἀρχαῖον ἔτι μόνον, ὥσπερ ἄλλοι τε καὶ ἐκεῖνος πολλάκις ἐκ τῶν

³ In particolare, dei fr. 12.1, 12.2, 12.3^a, 12.8, 12.9, 12.11.

⁴ Rich 2016, 278.

⁵ Un'analoga discussione si trova in Dionigi di Alicarnasso (4.71-75). In particolare, a 4.73.1, è appunto Bruto a esprimersi sui problemi che le riforme istituzionali inevitabilmente provocano, in termini molto simili a quelli che ritroviamo nel frammento di Dione (Fromentin 2013, 29-30; Burden-Strevens 2020, 96-7).

⁶ Urso 2005; 2011.

⁷ Nell'epitome di Zonara (7.21.4) il titolo di *imperator* viene riferito alla *salutatio* rivolta dalle truppe al loro comandante subito dopo la vittoria.

πολέμων ἐπεκλήθησαν, οὐδ' ὥς οἱ τινα αὐτοτελῇ ἡγεμονίαν ἢ καὶ ἄλλην τινὰ ἐξουσίαν λαβόντες ὠνομάζοντο, ἀλλὰ καθάπαξ τοῦτο δὴ τὸ καὶ νῦν τοῖς τὸ κράτος αἰεὶ ἔχουσι διδόμενον ἐκείνῳ τότε πρώτῳ τε καὶ πρώτον, ὥσπερ τι κύριον, προσέθεσαν. Καὶ τοσαύτη γέ ὑπερβολῇ κολακείας ἐχρήσαντο ὥστε καὶ τοὺς παῖδας τοὺς τε ἐγγόνους αὐτοῦ οὕτω καλεῖσθαι ψηφίσασθαι, μὴτε τέκνον τι αὐτοῦ ἔχοντος καὶ γέροντος ἤδη ὄντος. Ὁθενπερ καὶ ἐπὶ πάντας τοὺς μετὰ ταῦτα αὐτοκράτορας ἢ ἐπὶ κλησὶς αὕτη, ὥσπερ τις ἰδία τῆς ἀρχῆς αὐτῶν οὕσα καθάπερ καὶ ἡ τοῦ Καίσαρος, ἀφίκετο. Οὐ μέντοι καὶ τὸ ἀρχαῖον ἐκ τούτου κατελύθη, ἀλλ' ἔστιν ἐκάτερον.

In quell'occasione attribuirono a lui per primo e per la prima volta il nome di *imperator*, come una specie di nome proprio: non più solo nell'antico significato, come cioè erano stati spesso salutati lui e altri a seguito delle guerre combattute, o come venivano chiamati quanti assumevano un comando indipendente o un qualche altro incarico ufficiale;⁸ ma una volta per sempre, così come ancora oggi viene dato a coloro che successivamente detengono il potere. E giunsero a un tale eccesso di adulazione da decretare che fossero chiamati così anche i suoi figli e discendenti, benché non avesse figli e fosse già vecchio. Questo appellativo è passato da lui a tutti gli imperatori successivi, come un titolo proprio della loro carica, come anche quello di 'Cesare'. Però l'antico significato non è stato eliminato da questo, ma sussistono entrambi.

Anche Svetonio (*Iul.*, 76.2) parla del *praenomen Imperatoris*, presentandolo come uno degli «onori eccessivi» conferiti a Cesare durante e dopo la guerra civile.⁹ Il suo interesse per questa espressione non è certo casuale: per Svetonio, dopo tutto, il primo imperatore era stato appunto Cesare. Ma Dione dice molto di più: per lui l'appellativo di *imperator* attribuito a Cesare dopo Munda è lo stesso attribuito a «tutti gli imperatori successivi, come un titolo proprio della loro carica», e Cesare fu il primo a usarlo. Non solo: l'espressione οἱ μετὰ ταῦτα αὐτοκράτορες è utilizzata di nuovo a 53.16.3, per indicare i successori di Augusto,¹⁰ e il termine αὐτοκράτωρ sarà costante-

⁸ Rispetto all'*excursus* sul trionfo, qui la definizione è più articolata e, a quanto sembra, più conforme alla polisemia del termine *imperator* in età repubblicana: cf. Assenmaker 2012 (in particolare, su questo passo, pp. 113-4).

⁹ *Honores [...] nimios recepit: continuum consulatum, perpetuam dictaturam praefecturamque morum, insuper praenomen Imperatoris, cognomen patris patriae, statuum inter reges, suggestum in orchestra.*

¹⁰ «Per questo motivo gli imperatori successivi (οἱ μετὰ ταῦτα αὐτοκράτορες), sebbene non fossero nominati per un periodo di tempo determinato ma una sola volta per tutta la vita, tuttavia tenevano una celebrazione ogni dieci anni, come se in quell'occasione rinnovassero il loro comando. E questo accade ancora oggi».

mente impiegato da Dione per indicare tutti gli imperatori fino ai Severi. Da tutto ciò si deduce che per Dione c'è una precisa continuità tra Cesare, Augusto e gli imperatori successivi. Certo, va aggiunto che il passo su Cesare forse contiene una forzatura: diversi autorevoli studiosi hanno infatti sostenuto che qui Dione (come anche Svetonio prima di lui)¹¹ confonderebbe l'attribuzione a Cesare dell'appellativo perpetuo di *imperator* con l'adozione di esso come *praenomen* (ὥσπερ τι κύριον): questa non è attestata nelle iscrizioni né nelle monete cesariane e sarebbe stata un'innovazione di Ottaviano.¹² Resta il fatto che questa continuità tra Cesare, Ottaviano/Augusto e gli imperatori successivi viene in seguito ribadita da Dione a più riprese, e in modo coerente.

A questo proposito dobbiamo ora rivolgere la nostra attenzione al passo riguardante l'assunzione dell'appellativo di *imperator* da parte di Ottaviano. Esso segue immediatamente il dibattito tra Agrippa e Mecenate:

Cass. Dio 52.41.3-4 Ταῦτα τε ὁ Καῖσαρ, καὶ ὅσα ἄνω μοι τοῦ λόγου εἴρηται, ἔπραξεν ἐν τῷ ἔτει ἐκείνῳ ἐν ᾧ τὸ πέμπτον ὑπατεύσε, καὶ τὴν τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος ἐπὶ κλησὶν ἐπέθετο. Λέγω δὲ οὐ τὴν ἐπὶ ταῖς νίκαις κατὰ τὸ ἀρχαῖον διδομένην τισὶν (ἐκείνην γὰρ πολλὰκις μὲν καὶ πρότερον πολλὰκις δὲ καὶ ὕστερον ἀπ' αὐτῶν ἔργων ἔλαβεν, ὥστε καὶ ἅπαξ καὶ εἰκοσάκις ὄνομα αὐτοκράτορος σχεῖν) ἀλλὰ τὴν ἑτέραν τὴν τὸ κράτος διασημαίνουσαν, ὥσπερ τῷ τε πατρὶ αὐτοῦ τῷ Καίσαρι καὶ τοῖς παισὶ τοῖς τε ἐκγόνοις ἐψήφιστο.

Questi e quelli che ho menzionato sopra furono gli atti di Cesare nell'anno in cui fu console per la quinta volta e in cui assunse l'appellativo di *imperator*. Non mi riferisco a quel titolo che, secondo l'antico costume, veniva concesso a taluni a seguito delle loro vittorie (Cesare lo ricevette spesso, sia prima sia dopo questi avvenimenti, a motivo delle sue imprese, così che fu proclamato *imperator* per ventuno volte); ma a quello che indicava il potere, come era stato votato per suo padre Cesare e per i suoi figli e discendenti.

Per Dione, dunque, Ottaviano assunse l'appellativo di *imperator* con la medesima accezione con cui l'aveva assunto Cesare. È significativo che il nostro storico affermi di nuovo che questo era il termine che indicava il potere supremo: qui lo definisce come ἡ ἐπὶ κλησὶς τὸ κράτος διασημαίνουσα; nel precedente passo su Cesare (43.44.4), co-

¹¹ Secondo Millar 2000, 4, fonte di Dione sarebbe proprio Svetonio.

¹² Syme 1958, 175-7; Combès 1966, 123-6; Ferrary 2010, 18-9. Più sfumata è la posizione di Kienast 1999, 5, mentre la storicità della versione di Dione è ammessa da Simpson 1998, 420-2. Il problema rimane aperto per Assenmaker 2012, 113.

me ἡ ἐπικλήσις ἰδία τῆς ἀρχῆς αὐτῶν. Ed è altrettanto significativo che l'ultimo suggerimento di Mecenate a Ottaviano (52.40.2) riguardi appunto l'assunzione di questo appellativo «come lo diedero anche a tuo padre» (ὥσπερ καὶ τῷ πατρί σου ἔδωκαν). Dione qui ribadisce la continuità politica tra Cesare e suo figlio adottivo: il termine *imperator* è il contrassegno formale di questa continuità.

Dione ritorna sull'argomento nel libro successivo, subito dopo aver descritto l'assunzione, da parte di Ottaviano, dell'appellativo di *Augustus*:

Cass. Dio 53.17.4-5 Τὴν τε τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος πρόσρησιν διὰ παντὸς οὐ μόνον οἱ νικήσαντές τινες ἀλλὰ καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι πάντες, πρὸς δὴλωσιν τῆς αὐτοτελοῦς σφῶν ἐξουσίας, ἀντὶ τῆς τοῦ βασιλέως τοῦ τε δικτάτορος ἐπικλήσεως ἔχουσιν. Αὐτὰς μὲν γὰρ ἐκείνας οὐ τίθενται, ἐπειδήπερ ἅπαξ ἐκ τῆς πολιτείας ἐξέπεσον, τὸ δὲ δι' ἔργον αὐτῶν τῇ τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος προσηγορίᾳ βεβαιοῦνται.

Anziché il titolo di re o di dittatore, ricevono per sempre l'appellativo di *imperator*, non solo quelli che hanno riportato delle vittorie, ma anche tutti gli altri, come indicazione del loro potere assoluto. I titoli di re e di dittatore non vengono più assunti da quando sono usciti dalla prassi politica, ma la funzione di quelle cariche viene loro garantita proprio dall'appellativo di *imperator*.

E anche nel passo riguardante *Caesar* e *Augustus* Dione insiste sulla peculiarità di *imperator*, inteso come l'appellativo dei *principes* che indica il possesso del potere supremo:

Cass. Dio 53.18.2 Ἡ γὰρ διὰ τοῦ Καίσαρος ἢ τε τοῦ Αὐγούστου πρόσρησις δύναμιν μὲν οὐδεμίαν αὐτοῖς οἰκείαν προστίθησι, δηλοῖ δ' ἄλλως τὸ μὲν τὴν τοῦ γένους σφῶν διαδοχὴν, τὸ δὲ τὴν τοῦ ἀξιωματοῦ λαμπρότητα.

L'appellativo di 'Cesare' o di 'Augusto' non conferisce loro alcun potere personale, ma l'uno segnala la loro successione per linea dinastica, l'altro lo splendore della loro autorità.

Da tutto quanto si è detto possiamo concludere che per Dione il *primo imperatore fu Cesare*. Questa affermazione è coerente con quanto lo storico diceva alla fine del perduto *excursus* sulla dittatura, di cui resta l'epitome di Zonara. In esso si legge che Cesare, lasciandosi sedurre «dall'amore per la monarchia» (Zonar. 7.13.14: πρὸς ἔρωτα μοναρχίας), fu responsabile della trasformazione della dittatura in

un mezzo per esercitare il potere monarchico.¹³ Un’ulteriore, indiretta conferma si può trovare nel discorso di Cesare dopo Tapso (Cass. Dio 43.15-18), pieno di espressioni anacronistiche, che sembra il discorso che un imperatore ‘ideale’ avrebbe potuto pronunciare alla fine del II secolo d.C.¹⁴ E in questa stessa direzione ci porta l’inizio del libro 44, in cui, poco prima di descrivere l’assassinio di Cesare, Dione propone un lungo confronto tra μοναρχία e δημοκρατία (44.1.2-4), insistendo sulla superiorità e sulla maggiore utilità della prima rispetto alla seconda.

Per l’identificazione del primo imperatore Dione segue dunque la versione impostasi all’inizio del II secolo d.C.,¹⁵ accettata tra gli altri da Svetonio e da Frontone (Ver. 2.1.8) e dallo stesso Appiano (BC 2.148.617),¹⁶ ma già suggerita almeno implicitamente da alcuni autori del I secolo, come Nicola di Damasco (Vit. Caes. 130.58, 130.118, 130.120)¹⁷ e Flavio Giuseppe (AJ 19.174, 19.187).¹⁸ La particolarità di Dione consiste nel fatto che egli inserisce questo tema in una più ampia riflessione sulla transizione dalla repubblica al principato. Per Dione, la congiura delle Idi di marzo impedì la stabilizzazione di un nuovo regime (44.1): per questo motivo l’assunzione da parte di Cesare dell’appellativo di *imperator*, se fa di lui il primo imperatore, non corrisponde né all’inizio del principato, né alla fine della repubblica.

3

Per Cassio Dione, tra il tribunato di Tiberio Gracco e la dittatura di Cesare la repubblica (δημοκρατία)¹⁹ era andata sempre più trasformandosi in δυναστεία (espressione che potremmo in certi casi tradurre ‘regime’);²⁰ più esattamente, era stata caratterizzata dal susseguirsi di diverse δυναστεῖαι:²¹ quelle dei vari «capi fazione» (denominati

¹³ Per Dione, il responsabile della degenerazione della dittatura fu appunto Cesare, non Silla (Urso 2005, 51-2; 2016, 28-9; Carsana 2016, 556). Su questo punto torneremo in seguito (cf. *infra*).

¹⁴ Millar 1964, 80-1.

¹⁵ Bowersock 1969, 122-3; Geiger 1975; Zecchini 1990, 349-50.

¹⁶ Cf. anche BC 2.111.461 (citato *infra*).

¹⁷ Cf. Scardigli 1983, 52; Malitz 2003, 85; Martin 2012, 50-1.

¹⁸ Cf. Galimberti 2001, 190; Pistellato 2015, 190-1; 2020, 278-9.

¹⁹ Su δημοκρατία in Dione: Aalders 1986, 296-7.

²⁰ Oppure ‘potentato’, come proposto da M. Bono nel suo contributo in questo volume.

²¹ Su δυναστεία: Kemezis 2014, 104-12; Carsana 2016, 546-51. Per Dione, il periodo delle δυναστεῖαι inizia con il tribunato di Tiberio Gracco, in cui le opposte fazioni cominciarono per la prima volta a misurarsi «come se si fosse in un regime e non in una repubblica» (fr. 83.4: ὥσπερ ἐν δυναστείᾳ τινὶ ἀλλ’ οὐ δημοκρατίᾳ; cf. Urso 2013, 96-

στασίαρχοι nel fr. 96.1),²² che cercavano di imporre il loro potere con la forza, avvalendosi di strumenti istituzionali estranei al tradizionale sistema repubblicano. Formalmente, però, l'agonizzante repubblica era riuscita a sopravvivere sino a Munda. La morte di Cesare non implicò la sua piena rinascita, ma il ritorno temporaneo alla situazione che aveva preceduto Farsalo. Ci fu però un 'punto di non ritorno', che per Dione segnò la fine della repubblica e l'inizio di una fase nuova.

Un *terminus ante quem* si trova nelle prime righe del libro 50. Introducendo il suo racconto sugli avvenimenti del 32 a.C., Dione scrive:

Cass. Dio 50.1.1-2 'Ο δὲ δῆμος ὁ τῶν Ῥωμαίων τῆς μὲν δημοκρατίας ἀφῆρετο, οὐ μέντοι καὶ ἐς μοναρχίαν ἀκριβῆ ἀπεκέκριτο, ἀλλ' ὁ τε Ἀντώνιος καὶ ὁ Καῖσαρ ἐξ ἴσου ἔτι τὰ πράγματα εἶχον, τὰ τε πλείω σφῶν διειληχότες, καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ τῷ μὲν λόγῳ κοινὰ νομίζοντες, τῷ δὲ ἔργῳ, ὥς που πλεονεκτῆσαι τι ἐκάτερος αὐτῶν ἐδύνατο, ιδιούμενοι. Μετὰ δὲ δὴ τοῦτο, ὥς ὁ τε Σέξτος ἀπωλώλει καὶ ὁ Ἀρμένιος ἐαλώκει τὰ τε προσπολεμήσαντα τῷ Καίσαρι ἡσύχαζε καὶ ὁ Πάρθος οὐδὲν παρεκίνει, καὶ ἐκείνοι φανερώς ἐπ' ἀλλήλοις ἐτράποντο καὶ ὁ δῆμος ἀκριβῶς ἐδουλώθη.

Il popolo romano era stato privato della repubblica, eppure non era approdato a una monarchia vera e propria: Antonio e Cesare gestivano ancora gli affari pubblici su un piano di parità. La maggior parte di essi, l'avevano divisa tra loro; quel che restava, a parole lo consideravano comune a entrambi, in realtà cercavano di appropriarsene, laddove ciascuno dei due era in grado di acquisire un qualche vantaggio sull'altro. Ma in seguito, poiché Sesto²³ era morto, il re d'Armenia era stato catturato, i nemici di Cesare stavano quieti e i Parti non davano alcun segno di agitazione, i due si volsero apertamente l'uno contro l'altro e il popolo venne pienamente sottomesso.²⁴

Per Dione, dunque, quando Sesto Pompeo morì (nel 35) la repubblica (non la 'democrazia')²⁵ era finita da qualche tempo. Possiamo stabilire

7): a questo stesso periodo si riferisce certamente l'allusione alla *δυναστεία* dei tribuni della plebe in Zonar. 7.15.10. Come *δυναστεία* viene poi connotato il potere esercitato da Pompeo, ma soprattutto da Cesare negli anni del triumvirato e della guerra civile (39.55.2, 41.17.3, 43.25.3).

²² Le *δυναστεῖαι* degli *στασίαρχοι* monarchici sono evocate già in Appiano (*BC* 1.2.7; cf. *Carsana* 2016, 547).

²³ Sesto Pompeo.

²⁴ Per l'espressione ὁ δῆμος ἀκριβῶς ἐδουλώθη non ricorrerei al concetto di 'slavery', come nella traduzione di Cary 1917a, 437 (cf. 52.5.4: ἐς δουλείαν αὐτοῖς καταστήσαι).

²⁵ 'Démocratie' e 'democracy' sono le traduzioni ricorrenti in Cary 1916; 1917a; 1917b e in Freyburger, Roddaz 1991; 1994.

una data più precisa? Ci vengono in aiuto a questo riguardo due altri passi. Il primo di essi apre il racconto sull'anno 43:

Cass. Dio 45.17.6 Τότε δ' οὖν ταῦτά τε ἐγένετο, καὶ λόγια πρὸς κατάλυσιν τῆς δημοκρατίας φέροντα παντοῖα ᾔδετο.

Allora dunque accaddero queste cose. E venivano anche ripetuti oracoli di ogni genere, riguardanti la fine della repubblica.

Il secondo precede immediatamente la battaglia di Filippi, dell'anno successivo:

Cass. Dio 47.40.7 Ἐν μὲν οὖν τῇ Ῥώμῃ ταῦτ' ἐγίγνετο, καὶ τινα καὶ λόγια καὶ πρὸ αὐτῶν καὶ ἐπ' αὐτοῖς ἐς τὴν κατάλυσιν τῆς δημοκρατίας συμβαίνοντα ᾔδετο.

A Roma dunque accadevano queste cose. E sia prima, sia in seguito, venivano anche ripetuti alcuni oracoli che preannunciavano la fine della repubblica.

I due passi sono pressoché identici e si riferiscono entrambi alla fine della repubblica (κατάλυσιν τῆς δημοκρατίας). Questa insistenza non è casuale, ma suggerisce che per Dione il 'punto di non ritorno' non coincide con un solo avvenimento, ma con due: il secondo è chiaramente la battaglia di Filippi; il primo, che risale al 43, non può che essere la costituzione del triumvirato. A questo proposito è significativo che Dione non utilizzi il termine ἀρχή ('magistratura'), come fa Appiano (BC 4.2.6; καὶνὴ ἀρχή), ma il termine συνωμοσία, equivalente di *coniuratio* (46.52.1, 47.32.1, 48.21.1, 49.11.3), da lui già impiegato in precedenza per il 'primo triumvirato' (37.58.1, 38.2.2). Col senno di poi, Dione ritiene che dopo Filippi (e ancor di più dopo la morte di Sesto Pompeo)²⁶ la lotta politica riguardava ormai solo Antonio e Ottaviano.

Naturalmente, già altri prima di Dione avevano visto nella battaglia di Filippi un momento di svolta e la discussione sulla data conclusiva della repubblica era iniziata molto prima di lui.²⁷ Tra le fonti a noi pervenute Dione è però colui che offre l'interpretazione più complessa e articolata, associando la fine della repubblica a due avvenimenti (quello istituzionale e quello militare) e individuando, do-

²⁶ Si noti che a 46.40.3 [43 a.C.], Sesto Pompeo viene posto da Dione sullo stesso piano di Bruto e Cassio («A Sesto Pompeo diedero il comando della flotta, a Marco Bruto la Macedonia, a Cassio la Siria e la guerra contro Dolabella»), suggerendo l'idea di un 'triumvirato repubblicano' (Welch 2012, 163-4).

²⁷ Una tradizione nota a Flavio Giuseppe (AJ 19.187), per esempio, la poneva cento anni prima della morte di Caligola, ossia nel 60/59 a.C., in corrispondenza con la costituzione del 'primo triumvirato': è l'anno da cui Asinio Pollione iniziava le sue *Storie*.

po Filippi, un periodo intermedio, che non è più repubblica ma non è ancora ἀκριβὴς μοναρχία, «monarchia vera e propria».

4

Quanto all'inizio del principato, Dione sembra ammettere ben tre differenti cronologie.²⁸

Cass. Dio 51.1.1-2 [31 a.C.]: Ἡ ναυμαχία αὐτῶν τῇ δευτέρᾳ τοῦ Σεπτεμβρίου ἐγένετο. Τοῦτο δὲ οὐκ ἄλλως εἶπον (οὐδὲ γὰρ εἶωθα αὐτὸ ποιεῖν) ἀλλ' ὅτι τότε πρῶτον ὁ Καῖσαρ τὸ κράτος πᾶν μόνος ἔσχεν, ὥστε καὶ τὴν ἀπαρίθμησιν τῶν τῆς μοναρχίας αὐτοῦ ἐτῶν ἀπ' ἐκείνης τῆς ἡμέρας ἀκριβοῦσθαι.

Questa loro battaglia [la battaglia di Azio] ebbe luogo il 2 settembre. Non senza ragione dico questo contrariamente alle mie abitudini,²⁹ ma perché fu allora che Cesare per la prima volta ebbe da solo tutto il potere, tanto che il calcolo degli anni della sua monarchia viene fatto a partire esattamente da quel giorno.

Cass. Dio 52.1.1 [29 a.C.]: Ταῦτα μὲν ἔν τε τῇ βασιλείᾳ καὶ ἐν τῇ δημοκρατίᾳ ταῖς τε δυναστείαις, πέντε τε καὶ εἴκοσι καὶ ἑπτακοσίους ἔτεσι, καὶ ἔπραξαν οἱ Ῥωμαῖοι καὶ ἔπαθον· ἐκ δὲ τούτου μοναρχεῖσθαι αὐτοῖς ἀκριβῶς ἤρξαντο.

Queste furono le imprese e le vicissitudini dei Romani durante il periodo regio, la repubblica e le *dynasteiai*, nell'arco di 725 anni. Dopo di che ricominciarono esattamente dalla monarchia.³⁰

Cass. Dio 53.11.4-5 [27 a.C.]: Πολλὰ μὲν καὶ μεταξὺ ἀναγινώσκοντος αὐτοῦ διεβόων πολλὰ δὲ καὶ μετὰ τοῦτο, μοναρχεῖσθαι τε δεόμενοι καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐς τοῦτο φέροντα ἐπιλέγοντες, μέχρις οὗ κατηνάγκασαν δῆθεν αὐτὸν αὐταρχῆσαι. [...] Οὕτως ὥς ἀληθῶς καταθέσθαι τὴν μοναρχίαν ἐπεθύμησε.

²⁸ Ampia discussione in Manuwald 1979, 77-100.

²⁹ La datazione precisa di singoli avvenimenti si ritroverà in effetti solo nella descrizione del regno di Macrino (79[78].20.1, 79[78].31.4, 79[78].39.1; cf. Millar 1964, 44).

³⁰ Come abbiamo visto, per Dione il periodo delle *δυναστεῖαι* inizia con il tribunato di Tiberio Gracco. In questo passo egli ha dunque in mente un periodo più risalente rispetto alla svolta del 43-42.

Sia durante la lettura del discorso³¹ sia dopo la sua conclusione, essi [i senatori] continuavano a gridare, domandando con insistenza che fosse introdotta la monarchia e impiegando ogni argomento in suo favore, finché non lo costrinsero, evidentemente, ad assumere il potere assoluto. [...] In questo modo egli manifestò, come se fosse vero, il desiderio di deporre la monarchia.³²

Cass. Dio 53.17.1 [27 a.C.]: Οὕτω μὲν δὴ τό τε τοῦ δήμου καὶ τὸ τῆς γερουσίας κράτος πᾶν ἐς τὸν Αὐγουστον μετέστη, καὶ ἀπ' αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀκριβῆς μοναρχία κατέστη.

Fu così che il potere del popolo e del senato passò tutto ad Augusto e da questo momento si istituì una monarchia vera e propria.

La prima data corrisponde alla battaglia di Azio, la terza alle delibere del senato del gennaio del 27. Molto più interessante (e non attestata altrove) è la seconda data (29 a.C.), che apre il libro 52 e introduce il dibattito tra Agrippa e Mecenate. I moderni hanno variamente commentato questi passi, ora notando che le indicazioni cronologiche fornite da Dione appaiono confuse e contraddittorie,³³ ora ipotizzando che esse derivino dall'impiego di fonti diverse³⁴ o più semplicemente dalla trascuratezza dello storico nella redazione definitiva del suo testo.³⁵

Ma la contraddizione è forse solo apparente. Occorre anzitutto distinguere le affermazioni del primo passo citato (51.1.1-2) da quelle dei passi successivi. All'inizio del libro 51 Dione afferma che a partire da quel momento (cioè dopo Azio) Ottaviano ebbe πᾶν κράτος, vale a dire tutto quel potere che in precedenza egli aveva «diviso» con Antonio (cf. *supra*, 50.1.1-2). Dione però non dice che la μοναρχία ebbe inizio dopo Azio,³⁶ ma allude all'ἀπαρίθμησις τῶν τῆς μοναρχίας αὐτοῦ ἐτῶν, cioè al conteggio degli anni (mesi e giorni) del regno di Augusto: la cosiddetta 'era aziaca'. Si tratta semplicemente di una convenzione cronografica, in base alla quale la durata del regno di

³¹ Il discorso di Ottaviano in senato (53.3-10).

³² La traduzione corretta di questo passo è quella proposta da Bellissime, Hurlet 2018, 12: «C'est ainsi que César exprima un désir prétendument véridique d'abolir la monarchie». Ben diversa (e foriera di equivoci...) è la traduzione di Cary 1917b, 219: «When this was done, he was eager to establish the monarchy in very truth». Ma non si vede come il verbo κατατίθεσθαι possa significare 'to establish'. Dione utilizzerà lo stesso verbo a 53.32.5, a proposito del diritto, concesso ad Augusto nel 23 a.C., di non *deporre l'imperium proconsulare* all'interno del *pomerium*.

³³ Reinhold 1988, 118-19.

³⁴ Manuwald 1979, 77-100.

³⁵ Rich 1990, 14.

³⁶ Come ritengono Millar 1964, 38, 93; Freyburger, Roddaz 1991, 119.

Augusto, e degli imperatori dopo di lui, veniva calcolata a partire dal 2 settembre del 31 a.C. Si ritroverà questo conteggio nella pagina dedicata alla morte di Augusto (56.30.5)³⁷ e, in seguito, in altri ventuno passi, riguardanti quasi tutti gli imperatori successivi e contenenti l'indicazione degli anni, mesi e giorni del regno di ciascuno.³⁸ A 51.1.1-2, insomma, Dione vuole illustrare al lettore quel sistema cronologico che egli utilizzerà, a partire da quel momento, negli ultimi 30 libri della *Storia romana*. Ma dal punto di vista della storia istituzionale questo passo non ha alcuna rilevanza.

Molto più interessanti sono gli altri tre passi. 52.1.1 e 53.17.1 sono accomunati dall'uso dell'espressione ἀκριβῆς μοναρχία / ἀκριβῶς μοναρχεῖσθαι ('monarchia nel senso stretto del termine'), peraltro già impiegata, come abbiamo visto, all'inizio del libro 50. Il libro 52 si apre con un riferimento cronologico *ab urbe condita* (725 anni dalla fondazione di Roma): è interessante che questa indicazione si trovi all'inizio del libro 52 (sotto l'anno 29) e non all'inizio del libro 51 (sotto l'anno 31). Subito dopo il dibattito tra Agrippa e Mecenate (52.2-40), riprendendo il filo del discorso, Dione completa questa indicazione cronologica con la menzione del quinto consolato di Ottaviano (cf. *supra*, 52.41.3: «nell'anno in cui egli fu console per la quinta volta e in cui assunse l'appellativo di *imperator*»). La doppia formula di datazione (*ab urbe condita* e per anno consolare); la menzione, nello stesso contesto, del termine *imperator* (che è il fattore decisivo); il fatto che proprio qui sia posto il dibattito sul nuovo assetto istituzionale dello stato: tutto ciò suggerisce che per Dione il primo anno del principato fu il 29 a.C.³⁹

Ma il problema non si esaurisce qui. A 53.17.1 Dione torna infatti a menzionare la ἀκριβῆς μοναρχία, questa volta in corrispondenza dell'anno 27. La contraddizione sembrerebbe evidente: possiamo però risolverla alla luce di quanto è emerso a proposito della fine della repubblica. Abbiamo visto in precedenza che Dione colloca la κατάλυσις τῆς δημοκρατίας tra il 43 e il 42: l'istituzione del triumvirato ne è la *condizione* necessaria; la morte di Bruto e Cassio ne è il *momento conclusivo*. La doppia cronologia della ἀκριβῆς μοναρχία (29 e 27 a.C.) può forse essere spiegata allo stesso modo:

37 «Così morì il 19 agosto, giorno in cui era diventato console per la prima volta, dopo aver vissuto 75 anni, 10 mesi e 23 giorni (era infatti nato il 23 settembre) e dopo avere governato da solo (μοναρχήσας), dal giorno in cui vinse ad Azio, 44 anni meno 13 giorni».

38 58.28.5 (Tiberio), 59.30.1 (Caligola), 61[60].34.3 (Claudio), 63.29.3 (Nerone), 63[64].6.5² (Galba), 63[64].15.2¹ (Otone), 64[65].22.1 (Vitellio), 66.17.3-4 (Vespasiano), 66.18.4, 66.26.4 (Tito), 67.18.2 (Domiziano), 68.4.2 (Nerva), 68.33.3 (Traiano), 69.23.1 (Adriano), 70[71].1.1¹ (Antonino Pio), 73[72].22.6 (Commodo), 74[73].10.5 (Pertinace), 74[73].17.3 (Didio Giuliano), 77[76].17.4 (Settimio Severo), 79[78].6.5 (Caracalla), 79[78].41.4 (Macrino).

39 Il 29 fu anche l'anno della chiusura del tempio di Giano (11 gennaio) e del rientro di Ottaviano a Roma, con i suoi trionfi (13-15 agosto). Ma questi avvenimenti, più che un inizio, segnarono una fine: la fine delle guerre civili.

- i. la *condizione* per l’instaurazione del nuovo assetto istituzionale è l’assunzione da parte di Ottaviano dell’appellativo di *imperator*, presentato come il termine che designa la nuova ἀρχή post-repubblicana. Per Dione essa risale al 29. In realtà che il *praenomen Imperatoris* è attestato già in due monete fatte coniare dal console Agrippa nel 38:⁴⁰ Ottaviano aveva cominciato a farne uso tra la fine degli anni 40⁴¹ e l’inizio degli anni 30.⁴² Ma ciò non esclude una decisione formale del senato nel 29, che diede all’assunzione del *praenomen* il crisma dell’ufficialità;⁴³
- ii. il *momento conclusivo* è l’approvazione da parte del senato del «cambiamento del regime politico» (53.11.2: μετάσταςις τῆς πολιτείας), che risale al gennaio del 27: al momento cioè in cui i senatori (53.11.4) «costrinsero [Ottaviano] ad assumere il potere assoluto». Nella visione politica di Dione, l’approvazione dei senatori resta imprescindibile per il buon funzionamento dello stato: ma la decisione reale era stata presa altrove, due anni prima. Questo può spiegare la doppia cronologia:⁴⁴ come la repubblica si era conclusa tra il 43 e il 42, la ‘monarchia’ fu instaurata tra il 29 e il 27.

5

Per Cassio Dione, la fine della repubblica fu causata dall’emergere delle δυναστεῖαι, che la erosero per così dire dall’interno: si trattò di un processo graduale che raggiunse il suo culmine con Cesare, il quale trasformò la dittatura in un mezzo per esercitare il potere monarchico e assunse l’appellativo di *imperator* con un significato nuovo, che «ne indicava il potere»: lo stesso appellativo che fu poi assunto dagli imperatori successivi. L’uccisione di Cesare impedì al nuovo regime di consolidarsi e di trasformarsi in una ἀκριβὴς μοναρχία, ma l’istituzione del triumvirato e la battaglia di Filippi posero fine alla repubblica una volta per sempre. Gli anni 30 furono un periodo intermedio, che non era più δημοκρατία ma non era ancora μοναρχία.

⁴⁰ Crawford 1974, 535 (nrr. 534/1 e 534/3).

⁴¹ Bellissime, Hurlet 2018, 73.

⁴² Simpson 1998, 424.

⁴³ Rosenberg 1914, 1146; Freyburger, Roddaz 1991, 166; Kienast 1999, 80; Letta 2016, 249.

⁴⁴ Alla nuova fase appartengono già i provvedimenti del 28, descritti da Dione nei primi due capitoli del libro 53: l’eliminazione dei poteri straordinari di Ottaviano, in precedenza assicurati dallo *status* di triumviro, getta le basi su cui si fonderanno i suoi nuovi poteri. Appunto al 28 risale il noto *aureus* con la legenda *LEGES ET IURA P R RESTITUIT* (‘ristabili’, non ‘restitui’: Mantovani 2008).

Dalla repubblica al principato ci fu dunque soluzione di continuità: un periodo di circa quindici anni, dal 43-42 al 29-27.

La complessità di questo schema è coerente con quel *fil rouge* dell’opera di Dione cui ho accennato all’inizio: un sistema politico non può cambiare all’improvviso, ma richiede un’evoluzione graduale. Le apparenti contraddizioni nel racconto di Dione sulla transizione dalla repubblica al principato si spiegano con questa concezione di fondo. E non solo quelle cronologiche, ma anche quelle sull’identità del ‘fondatore’: per Dione, Cesare fu il fondatore della ‘monarchia imperiale’, ma il fondatore dell’impero fu Augusto. Dione ovviamente sa che sull’identità del primo imperatore la discussione era da tempo aperta. La sua ricostruzione può certo essere interpretata anche come il tentativo di armonizzare due tradizioni differenti; ma è senz’altro più di questo. Dione è anche, se non soprattutto, uno storico delle istituzioni romane: egli comprende che la transizione dalla repubblica al principato era stato un processo molto complesso, in cui si potevano cogliere elementi di continuità e di discontinuità, di gradualità e di accelerazione.⁴⁵ Cercando di elaborare la sua personale interpretazione di questo processo, come pure cercando di armonizzare differenti tradizioni, Dione finisce col proporre una ricostruzione che è coerente non soltanto in sé stessa, ma anche rispetto al modo in cui egli interpreta l’evoluzione politica e istituzionale della storia di Roma.

A questo riguardo può essere interessante un breve confronto con un passo di Appiano, riguardante l’uccisione di Cesare:

App. BC 2.111.461-463 Καί τινες ἀπὸ τοῦδε ἐτόλμων λέγειν, ὅτι χρηῖ Ῥωμαίων μὲν αὐτόν, ὥσπερ ἦν, δικτάτορα καὶ αὐτοκράτορα καλεῖν καὶ ὅσα ἄλλα ἐστὶν αὐτοῖς ἀντὶ βασιλείας ὀνόματα, τῶν δὲ ἔθνων, ὅσα Ῥωμαίοις ὑπήκοα, ἀντικρυς ἀνειπεῖν βασιλέα. Ὁ δὲ καὶ τότε παρητέτο καὶ τὴν ἔξοδον ὅλως ἐπετάχυνεν, ἐπίφθορος ὢν ἐν τῇ πόλει. Ἐξιέναι δ’ αὐτόν μέλλοντα πρὸ τετάρτης ἡμέρας οἱ ἐχθροὶ κατέκανον ἐν τῷ βουλευτηρίῳ, εἴτε διὰ ζῆλον εὐτυχίας τε καὶ δυνάμεως ὑπερόγκου πάνυ γενομένης, εἴθ’ ὥς ἔφασκον αὐτοί, τῆς πατρίου πολιτείας ἐπιθυμία· εὐ γὰρ ᾔδεσαν αὐτόν, μὴ καὶ τὰδε τὰ ἔθνη προσλαβὼν ἀναμφιλόγως γένοιτο βασιλεὺς. Ταύτης δὲ σκοπῶν ἡγοῦμαι τῆς προσθήκης ἀφορμὴν λαβεῖν ἐγχειρήσεως, ἐς ὄνομα μόνον αὐτοῖς διαφερούσης, ἔργῳ δὲ καὶ τοῦ δικτάτορος ὄντος ἀκριβῶς βασιλέως.

⁴⁵ Del resto anche oggi il problema della continuità, o della discontinuità, tra Cesare e Augusto continua a essere oggetto di discussione. Su questo punto cf. Zecchini 2010 (con discussione dell’ampia bibliografia).

E per questo⁴⁶ alcuni osavano dire che bisognava chiamarlo dittatore e imperatore dei Romani, come appunto egli era, e con gli altri nomi che essi utilizzano per non parlare di regno; ma dei popoli soggetti ai Romani doveva essere detto apertamente re. Ma egli rifiutava anche questa scappatoia⁴⁷ e affrettava senz'altro la partenza, perché in città era odiato. Quattro giorni prima della sua partenza i suoi nemici lo uccisero in senato, vuoi per invidia del suo successo e del suo potere, divenuto davvero eccessivo, vuoi per nostalgia (come affermavano loro) della costituzione dei padri. Poiché lo conoscevano bene, temevano che, se avesse conquistato anche queste genti, sarebbe divenuto re senza incontrare opposizione. Riflettendoci, ritengo che essi abbiano preso questo titolo aggiuntivo⁴⁸ come pretesto per la loro impresa: per loro esso differiva solo nominalmente, poiché in realtà un dittatore era precisamente un re.

Per Appiano discutere sul significato dei titoli di Cesare significa spaccare il capello in quattro. L'approccio di Dione al problema è molto diverso. Certo, nel perduto *excursus* sull'origine della dittatura anche Dione affermava che i poteri del dittatore erano *sostanzialmente* equivalenti a quelli di un re (Zonar. 7.13.12-13).⁴⁹ Ma Dione insiste sul fatto che questi poteri erano sottoposti a due limiti, quello della sua durata nel tempo (non più di sei mesi) e quello sull'impossibilità di esercitarlo al di fuori dell'Italia:⁵⁰ tali limiti avevano appunto lo scopo di evitare che il potere dittatoriale si trasformasse in monarchia, come accade appunto a Cesare (Zonar. 7.13.14). Per Appiano con Cesare il problema non si pone più, perché secondo lui la degenerazione si era già prodotta sotto Silla: vincitore della guerra civile, Silla già deteneva, di fatto, un potere regio o tirannico (*BC* 1.98.456: ἔργῳ βασιλεὺς ὢν ἢ τύραννος); la dittatura da lui assunta nel novembre dell'82 «per quanto tempo voleva»,⁵¹ da potere «assoluto ma limitato nel tempo», «allora per la prima volta [...] divenne una perfetta tirannide» (1.99.462: τότε δὲ πρῶτον [...] τυραννὶς ἐγίγνετο ἐντελής), in cui i Romani «sperimentavano di nuovo la βασιλεία». Per Dione, invece,

⁴⁶ Il progetto della guerra contro i Parti.

⁴⁷ Ὅ δὲ καὶ τόδε παρητεῖτο: per la traduzione 'scappatoia' seguo Gabba, Magnino 2001, 363. 'Anche' si riferisce al famoso episodio dei Lupercali, che Appiano ha descritto poco prima (*BC* 109.456-458).

⁴⁸ Il titolo di re.

⁴⁹ Del resto questo confronto non era certo una novità: cf. già Cic., *rep.*, 2.32.56 (*genus imperii visum est et proximum similitudini regiae*).

⁵⁰ Quest'ultimo punto è evocato nel discorso di Catulo del 67, sulla *lex Gabinia de imperio Gnaei Pompeii* (36.34.1-2).

⁵¹ Cf. *civ.*, 1.3.10: ἐς αἰεί.

la degenerazione si produsse sotto Cesare: l'abolizione dei limiti di tempo tradizionalmente legati alla dittatura e la contemporanea assunzione dell'appellativo di αὐτοκράτωρ, nel suo 'nuovo' significato, segnano il momento della transizione.⁵² Quella che per Appiano è una mera questione terminologica, per Dione è il seme di una nuova era.

6

Un'ultima osservazione ci permette di confermare la piena coerenza dell'opera dionea. Questa visione complessa della transizione dalla repubblica al principato, che ho cercato di delineare, mostra significative somiglianze con quanto emerge, sull'origine della repubblica, dai primi libri della *Storia romana*.⁵³ La versione di Dione (ricostruibile dai frammenti e dall'epitome di Zonara) presenta tratti di assoluta originalità. Dopo la cacciata dei Tarquinii, i Romani scelgono un 'magistrato' (ἄρχων), Bruto, affiancato da un 'collega' (συνάρχων: Zonar. 7.12.1), Tarquinio Collatino.⁵⁴ Lo stesso P. Valerio Publicola, subentrato a Collatino, e in seguito Menenio Agrippa vengono definiti col solo titolo di συνάρχων (Cass. Dio, fr. 13.2; Zonar. 7.12.4; 7.13.9): la terminologia impiegata *sembrerebbe* suggerire l'esistenza di una gerarchia tra i due 'magistrati' (in seguito chiamati 'pretori', στρατηγοί).⁵⁵ Comunque sia, nel primo collegio decemvirale (451

52 Burden-Strevens 2019, 141-7 ha richiamato l'attenzione sul fatto che Catulo, nel suo discorso del 67 a.C. contro la *lex Gabinia*, dice che dopo l'esperienza di Silla la dittatura è ormai screditata: Cass. Dio 36.34.3 οὐτ' ἂν ὑπομείνατε ἔτι οὐχ ὅτι τὸ ἔργον τοῦ δικτάτορος, ἀλλ' οὐδὲ τὸ ὄνομα (δῆλον δὲ ἐξ ὧν πρὸς τὸν Σύλλαν ἠγανακτήσατε) («Né voi sopportereste più non solo la funzione ma nemmeno il nome di dittatore: lo dimostra l'indignazione che voi provaste nei confronti di Silla»). È per lo meno curioso che Dione metta in bocca una simile affermazione proprio a Catulo, il più intransigente custode dell'eredità di Silla (Flor. 2.11.6: *dux et signifer Sullanae dominationis*), addirittura rappresentato nell'*oratio Macri* come «di gran lunga più crudele» del dittatore stesso (*longe saevior*: Sall., *hist.*, 3 fr. 48.9 Maurenbrecher). Sulla storicità dell'affermazione di Catulo è lecito nutrire più di un dubbio; ma ciò che ci interessa è ovviamente il punto di vista dello storico. Ora, Dione ritorna sull'argomento sotto l'anno 54, quando parla delle voci sul possibile conferimento della dittatura a Pompeo (40.45.5): πρὸς γὰρ τὴν τοῦ Σύλλου ὁμότητα ἐμίσουν πάντες τὸ πόλιτευμα («Tutti detestavano questa forma di governo a causa della crudeltà di Silla»). Il tema centrale è quello della *crudeltà* di Silla, che a Dione ricorda quella di un imperatore dei suoi tempi, Settimio Severo (Urso 2016, 16-22). Si tratta dunque di due piani diversi e non contraddittori: per Dione, la dittatura era detestata a Roma già prima di Cesare, a causa della crudeltà esibita da Silla; ma colui che trasformò la dittatura, esercitandola in modo «contrario alla tradizione» (Zonar. 7.13.14: παρὰ τὰ νενομισμένα), fu appunto Cesare.

53 Su questo tema cf. Urso 2005; in particolare per la discussione dei passi sotto citati, Urso 2011.

54 Cf. Cass. Dio, fr. 13.2; Zonar. 7.12.4, 7.13.9.

55 Cass. Dio, fr. 18.3, 20.3, 21.3; Zonar. 7.14.3, 7.17.5, 7.17.6.

a.C.) il principio della collegialità diseguale è chiaramente affermato nella distinzione tra due 'pretori con poteri assoluti' (Zonar. 7.18.2: στρατηγοὺς αὐτοκράτορας), Appio Claudio e Tito Genucio, e altri otto membri; la collegialità vera e propria risulta introdotta nel secondo collegio decemvirale (450), dove tutti i membri «esercitavano il potere alla pari» (7.18.4: ἀπὸ τῆς ἴσης); infine nel 449, ritornando alla coppia di magistrati supremi (ora 'colleghi' a tutti gli effetti), i Romani ne cambiano il nome: invece che 'pretori' li chiamano per la prima volta 'consoli' (7.19.1: ὑπάτοι).

Sembra dunque che nei primi libri della *Storia romana* Dione descrivesse un'evoluzione graduale tra la fine della monarchia arcaica e la nascita della repubblica 'consolare'. Come è noto, la durata a termine delle magistrature e la loro collegialità erano i due principi su cui il nuovo assetto istituzionale si fondava: per Dione, la durata a termine delle magistrature fu introdotta immediatamente dopo la caduta dei Tarquinii; la piena collegialità, sessant'anni dopo; e l'istituzione del consolato fu il punto di arrivo di questo processo di trasformazione (e non il punto di partenza, come nel resto della tradizione). Allo stesso modo, per Dione, la fine della repubblica scaturisce da una disgregazione graduale delle istituzioni tradizionali, che culmina nell'assunzione dell'appellativo perpetuo di *imperator* da parte di Cesare, si conclude col secondo triumvirato e con la battaglia di Filippi, e lascia spazio a un periodo di transizione di circa quindici anni fino al 'ritorno della monarchia'. *Natura non facit saltus* – e nemmeno le 'costituzioni'.

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Cassius Dio and the Principate

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Teoria politica e scrittura storiografica nei ‘libri imperiali’ della *Storia Romana* di Cassio Dione

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Abstract This paper investigates to what extent the emergence of the *princeps* shapes Dio's narrative. The best fitting passages for investigating this topic are the so called “anecdotal-biographical sections”, which cannot be utterly dismissed as pieces of imperial biography: it would be better to consider those sections as devoted to the evaluation of the emperor's praxis of government on a very concrete (rather than moralistic) ground. These narrative proceedings betray the existence of a well-structured framework lying beneath the work's building in terms of political thought. In fact, Dio develops a consistent perspective about the relationship he expected between the *princeps* and the senate, fashioned, to my mind, by the *princeps civilis* model. This paradigm is sustained by a very classical political theory, although remoulded: the ‘mixed constitution’ theory.

Keywords Cassius Dio's contemporary history. Imperial Historiography. Mixed Constitution Theory. Emperor-Senate relationships. *Civilitas Principis*.

Sommario 1 Introduzione. – 2 Πολιτεία e storiografie. – 3 I criteri ordinatori della narrazione nei ‘libri imperiali’. – 4 La *civilitas principis*. – 5 Osservazioni conclusive.



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1 Introduzione

Nell'ultimo libro della *Storia Romana* di Cassio Dione, dedicato all'impero di Severo Alessandro (l. 80: 222-235 d.C.), al senato quale componente istituzionale del principato non è riservata alcuna menzione. La sola eccezione è rappresentata da un riferimento zonariano,¹ neppure ritenuto genuino da tutti gli interpreti.² Il dato è tanto più significativo se si considera che Severo Alessandro è ricordato dalla tradizione a lui favorevole come il promotore di una politica di collaborazione con il senato che, di conseguenza, avrebbe riacquisito in questo periodo rinnovato prestigio e autorità.³ Non meno rilevante è che Cassio Dione fu rappresentate insigne del consesso senatorio di Severo Alessandro: fu console (ordinario) *iterum* nel 229 d.C., come collega dell'imperatore (*cos. III*).⁴ D'altra parte, nella chiusa del libro, i riflettori sono puntati proprio su Cassio Dione, che imprime in tal modo una sorta di *sphragis* all'intera opera, ponendo in risalto tanto il ruolo di uomo politico da lui rivestito, quanto quello di storico del proprio tempo: l'episodio che chiude l'opera, il suo allontanamento dal centro del potere in ragione delle minacce dei pretoriani (229 d.C.),⁵ rende il lettore partecipe della sensazione di disillusione⁶ nutrita da Cassio Dione nei confronti del potere imperiale di cui è titolare Severo Alessandro e di cui lo storico consegna un'immagine opaca, offuscata dall'ingombrante presenza dei *milites* (pretoriani ed eserciti provinciali).⁷ Reali protagonisti del libro sono, insomma, gli apparati militari e lo stesso Cassio Dione.

È possibile scorgere, dietro una simile distribuzione della materia e dei ruoli assegnati a ciascun attore politico nel libro 80, un significato più profondo?

Per rispondere al quesito appena sollevato, occorre esplorare tanto l'articolazione della *Storia Romana* sotto il profilo narrativo, quanto l'impalcatura di pensiero a essa sottesa.

¹ Zon. 12.15 p. 571.3-10 B (pp. 119.21-120.9 D), relativo ai collaboratori del *princeps*.

² Letta 1991, 689. Già Boissvain 1901, 477 lo considerava di collocazione incerta.

³ Cf. Hdn. 6.1.2; H.A. *Alex. Sev.* 16.1; questa è tutta giocata su tale modulo, talvolta a costo di grossolani anacronismi (Chastagnol 2004², 204): vd. ora Bertrand-Dagenbach, Moliner-Arbo 2014.

⁴ Sulla biografia di Cassio Dione da ultimo Molin 2016a; Christol 2016; Letta 2019 (di cui condivido la proposta di datazione del consolato suffetto alla prima metà del 222 d.C.: 169).

⁵ Cass. Dio 80.4.2-5.

⁶ Cf. Bering-Staschewski 1981, 126, che interpretava l'inserzione di Hom. *Il.* 11.163-4 nella chiusa dell'opera quale espressione della visione pessimistica dello storico sull'impero.

⁷ Il solo commento disponibile – a me noto – ai libri contemporanei della *Storia Romana* è Scott 2018 [libri 78(79)-80(80): Macrino-Severo Alessandro]. Si può consultare anche la nuova traduzione italiana dei libri severiani, con note ricche e aggiornate agli studi più recenti, curata da Galimberti, Stroppa 2018.

2 Πολιτεῖαι e storiografie

Nel noto passo 'metodologico' contenuto in 53.19.1-2, Cassio Dione istituisce un confronto fra μεταβολή 'costituzionale' (ἡ...πολιτεία...μετεκοσμήθη) e forme della narrazione storica: οὐ μέντοι καὶ ὁμοίως τοῖς πρόσθεν τὰ μετὰ ταῦτα πραχθέντα λεχθῆναι δύναται («non è certamente possibile raccontare i fatti accaduti dopo di ciò – ovvero, dopo gli avvenimenti del 27 a.C. – allo stesso modo di prima»).⁸ Anche Tacito (*Ann.* 4.32-33 – capitoli che, significativamente, precedono il racconto del processo *de maiestate* intentato nel 25 d.C. contro lo storico Cremuzio Cordo) riflette diffusamente sull'*inglorius labor* cui sono asserviti gli storici dell'età imperiale⁹ e sulle connessioni tra forma politico-istituzionale di uno 'Stato' e forme della storiografia. Oltre a mettere a nudo il differente tenore della storiografia repubblicana e imperiale in termini di contenuto,¹⁰ Tacito sottolinea come gli eventi narrati dalla storiografia imperiale, «forse di poco conto e poco degni di essere ricordati» (*parva forsitan et levia memoratu*: 32.1), siano tali soltanto *primo aspectu*: anch'essi sono latori di un valore intrinseco, da indagare in profondità (*introspicere*).¹¹ Nella riflessione condotta da Cassio Dione, l'accento è invece posto sull'accessibilità limitata alle fonti, sull'impossibilità di una verifica accurata dei fatti e sulle difficoltà riscontrate nella raccolta di informazioni circa gli episodi esterni all'*urbs* a causa della vastità dell'impero e del numero cospicuo di avvenimenti che si verificano al di fuori di essa.¹² Nella prospettiva assunta da Cassio Dione si può avvertire l'impatto della condizione dei tempi in cui vive, distinti – piuttosto che dalla *modice lacessita pax* lamentata da Tacito – da numerose guerre civili (193-197 e 217-218 d.C.) e da molteplici teatri di guerra, al-

⁸ Ove non diversamente indicato, le traduzioni dal latino e dal greco appartengono a chi scrive.

⁹ Contrapposti ai *qui veteres populi romani res composuere*: Tac. *Ann.* 4.32.1.

¹⁰ Tac. *Ann.* 4.32.3-4: *Pleraque eorum quae rettuli quaeque referam parva forsitan et levia memoratu videri non nescius sum: sed nemo annalis nostros cum scriptura eorum contenderit qui veteres populi Romani res composuere. Ingentia illi bella, expugnationes urbium, fusos captosque reges [...] memorabant: nobis in arto et inglorius labor; immota quippe aut modice lacessita pax [...] Non tamen sine usu fuerit introspicere illa primo aspectu levia ex quibus magnarum saepe rerum motus oriuntur* (So che la maggior parte dei fatti che ho riferito e che riferirò sembreranno forse di poco conto e poco degni di essere ricordati: ma nessuno potrebbe mettere a confronto i nostri *Annales* con le opere di coloro che misero per iscritto le antiche vicende del Popolo Romano. Costoro tramandavano grandi guerre, espugnazioni di città, sovrani annientati o imprigionati [...] la nostra fatica è invece limitata e priva di gloria; una pace immobile quasi mai pungolata [...]). Tuttavia, non sarà inutile approfondire quei fatti apparentemente privi di valore, da cui spesso derivano grandi rivolgimenti).

¹¹ Tac. *Ann.* 4.32.2.

¹² Cass. Dio 53.19.3-5. Per un confronto fra i due passi cf. già Gabba 1984, 75-6; Noè 1994, 12-3 e *ad loc.*; Escribano 1999, 188-9; Kemezis 2014, 95-6; Rodríguez Horrillo 2017.

lestiti in contemporanea su più fronti.¹³ Ad ogni modo, l'impossibilità di documentare accuratamente i fatti di politica estera provoca il restringimento dell'orizzonte narrativo ai fatti di politica interna: in conclusione, tanto per Tacito, quanto per Cassio Dione le modalità di riscrittura della storia e i suoi contenuti mutano insieme col mutare dei sistemi 'costituzionali'. Tuttavia, le argomentazioni dei due autori si originano da premesse antitetiche. Diversamente da Tacito, che nel capitolo 33 si esprime in maniera pessimistica sulla possibilità di realizzare in forma duratura (*haud diuturna esse potest*) una costituzione mista (*consociata rei publicae forma*), Cassio Dione prende le mosse da una riflessione sul cambiamento 'costituzionale' occorso a Roma nel 27 a.C., dipinto in termini affatto positivi:

Cass. Dio 53.19.1 ἡ μὲν οὖν πολιτεία οὕτω τότε πρὸς τε τὸ βέλτιον καὶ πρὸς τὸ σωτηριωδέστερον μετεκοσμήθη: καὶ γάρ που καὶ παντάπασιν ἀδύνατον ἦν δημοκρατουμένους αὐτοὺς σωθῆναι.

Dunque, la 'costituzione' fu a quel tempo riorganizzata per il meglio e in maniera più sicura: infatti, era assolutamente impossibile che essi [*scil.* i Romani] restassero al sicuro sotto il governo della repubblica.¹⁴

L'idea di riordino 'costituzionale' riaffiora quasi identica nell'ultimo dei libri augustei e precisamente in Cass. Dio 56.44.2, dove Augusto è elogiato per aver riorganizzato, fortificandolo, il governo di Roma (τὸ πολίτευμα πρὸς τε τὸ κράτιστον μετεκόσμησε), dopo aver posto fine alle guerre civili (τό τε στασιάζον πᾶν ἔπαυσε). Il capitolo in questione è preceduto dalla nota definizione che Cassio Dione assegna al governo augusteo (56.43.4), interpretato come una combinazione di *monarchia* e *demokratia* (τὴν μοναρχίαν τῇ δημοκρατίᾳ μίξας), capace di preservare la libertà dei cittadini (τό τε ἐλεύθερόν σφισιν ἐτήρησε) e di riportare ordine e sicurezza nella *res publica* (καὶ τὸ κόσμιον τό τε ἀσφαλὲς προσπαρεσκεύασεν). Contrariamente allo scetticismo di cui dà prova Tacito, Cassio Dione crede, cioè, nella realizzabilità di

¹³ Per la ricostruzione delle vicende vd. in generale Letta 1991; Mazza 1996a; 1996b; 1996c; Campbell 2005. Sul racconto dioneo relativo alla storia contemporanea ad es. Gabba 1955; Millar 1964, 119-73; Letta 1979 e 2016 (in specie per l'uso delle fonti); Rubin 1980; Bering-Stachewski 1981; Espinosa Ruiz 1982; Schmidt 1997; Schettino 2001; Slavich 2001; Davenport 2012; Kemezis 2012 e 2014; Rantala 2016; Osgood 2016; Molin 2016b; Madsen 2016 e 2018 (part. 298-302); Scott 2015; 2017; 2018 e il suo contributo in questo volume; Schulz 2019.

¹⁴ Sul rapporto di equivalenza tra (*libera*) *res publica* e δημοκρατία (Mason 1974, s.v. «δημοκρατία») in Cassio Dione e.g. Fechner 1986, 37-9; Aalders 1986, 296-9 (che ritiene l'uso del termine, da parte di Cassio Dione, disomogeneo); Espinosa Ruiz 1987, 309-14; Freyburger Galland 1997, 116-17 e 122; Markov 2013; Bellissime 2016.

un governo misto e ne attribuisce l'attuazione, a Roma, ad Augusto.¹⁵ Il fatto che nella riflessione dionea una costituzione risultante dalla mescolanza tra μοναρχία e δημοκρατία sia avverabile non è irrilevante, giacché coinvolge aspetti di natura politico-ideologica sottesi alla sua produzione storiografica. Cassio Dione considera difatti questa forma di governo superiore rispetto al regime politico precedente: in 53.19.1, riferendosi al 27 a.C. (τότε), egli afferma che Augusto riorganizzò la πολιτεία dei Romani in una direzione migliore (πρός τε τὸ βέλτιον), confermando tale giudizio positivo a proposito del rioridino costituzionale augusteo in 56.43.4, dove si definisce in maniera più 'tecnica' il tipo di πολιτεία instaurata da Augusto.¹⁶

È allora opportuno chiedersi in quale modo e sotto quali forme, nella 'teoria della costituzione mista' esposta da Cassio Dione, l'elemento monarchico e quello repubblicano siano ricombinati all'interno della μίξις 'costituzionale'. Se l'elemento monarchico sembra essere concepito come espressione della sovranità del *princeps*, che esercita il potere imperiale in forma non tirannica¹⁷ (56.43.4: ἔξω δὲ καὶ τῶν τυραννικῶν ὕβρεων ὄντας...καὶ ἐν μοναρχίᾳ ἀδεεῖ ζῆν, βασιλευμένους τε ἄνευ δουλείας - con riferimento alla μίξις augustea), il coefficiente di δημοκρατία contemplato dalla 'costituzione mista' elogiata da Cassio Dione pare coincidere con la *libertas* intesa, nella prospettiva aristocratica senatoria abbracciata dallo storico,¹⁸ quale principio fondamentale di azione e partecipazione politica alla vita della *res publica*, pur nel riconoscimento esplicito della posizione di preminenza ormai assunta dall'imperatore-βασιλεύς nel governo dell'impero.¹⁹ Indicativo, in questo senso, proprio il passo in 56.43.4, dove Cassio

¹⁵ Cf. su questi aspetti anche i contributi di Madsen e Lindholmer in questo volume.

¹⁶ Sul modello di costituzione mista in Cassio Dione già Carsana 1990, 93-4; Coltelloni-Tranoy 2016b. Per Manuwald 1979, 24-5 tale valutazione del principato augusteo deriverebbe dalle fonti impiegate da Cassio Dione. Swan 2004, 348 ritiene l'interpretazione dionea «abstract and simplistic».

¹⁷ Cf. Cass. Dio 52.15.1: μὴ γάρ τοι οἰηθῆς ὅτι τυραννῆσαι σοι, τόν τε δῆμον καὶ τὴν βουλὴν δουλωσάμενός, παραινῶ (Non credere infatti che io ti esorti a divenire un tiranno, rendendo schiavi il popolo e il senato).

¹⁸ Incisiva a riguardo la riflessione di Wirszubski 1950, 138: «But by virtue of its tradition and by the strength of convention the Senate was regarded, by senators at any rate, as the constitutional embodiment of the *res publica*. Consequently, the rights and dignity of the Senate and the magistrates who sat in it were looked upon as a manifestation of the *res publica*. And this is why in senatorial quarters under the Empire the assertion of the Senate's rights becomes *libertas* tout court».

¹⁹ Cass. Dio 53.17.2-3 τὸ μὲν γὰρ ὄνομα αὐτὸ τὸ μοναρχικὸν οὕτω δὴ τὶ οἱ Ῥωμαῖοι ἐμίσησαν ὥστε μήτε δικτάτορας μήτε βασιλέας μήτ' ἄλλο τι τοιοῦτότροπον τοὺς αὐτοκράτορας σφωὺν ὀνομάζειν· τοῦ δὲ δὴ τῆς πολιτείας τέλους ἔς αὐτοὺς ἀνακειμένου οὐκ ἔστιν ὅπως οὐ βασιλεύονται (I Romani odiano a tal punto ogni nome che designa un potere monarchico che non chiamano i loro imperatori né dittatori, né re né con altro appellativo dello stesso genere: ma poiché il governo è interamente affidato a loro [scil. agli imperatori] non vi è alcun dubbio che essi esercitino un potere monarchico).

Dione, illustrando i vantaggi della *μίξις* realizzata da Augusto, pone l'accento sulla correlazione tra democrazia e *ἐλευθερία*:²⁰

Cass. Dio 56.43.4 τὴν μοναρχίαν τῇ δημοκρατίᾳ μίξας τό τε ἐλεύθερόν σφισιν ἐτήρησε καὶ τὸ κόσμιον τό τε ἀσφαλὲς προσπαρεσκεύασεν, ὥστ' ἔξω μὲν τοῦ δημοκρατικοῦ θράσους ἔξω δὲ καὶ τῶν τυραννικῶν ὕβρεων ὄντας ἔν τε ἐλευθερίᾳ σώφρονι καὶ ἐν μοναρχίᾳ ἀδεεῖζῃν, βασιλευμένους τε ἄνευ δουλείας καὶ δημοκρατουμένους ἄνευ διχοστασίας.

Avendo mescolato la monarchia al regime repubblicano preservò loro la *libertas* e assicurò l'ordine, cosicché, lontani dalla tracotanza del governo del popolo e dalla superbia delle tirannidi, vivessero in una libertà moderata e in una monarchia non opprimente, governati da un sovrano senza essere schiavi e partecipi di una democrazia priva di discordie.

Significativamente, la *libertas* invocata da Cassio Dione quale portato della *μίξις* 'costituzionale' augustea è qualificata come σώφρων, moderata. Una simile caratterizzazione, in termini politico-istituzionali, della mescolanza tra monarchia e democrazia ci riconduce all'*incipit* del discorso mecenatiano (52.14.4), dove Mecenate ravvisa nell'instaurazione della monarchia da lui caldeggiata una 'vera democrazia' (δημοκρατία ἀληθής), esito del riordino della πολιτεία in senso geometrico: la monarchia proposta da Mecenate realizzerebbe una democrazia ἀληθής attribuendo a ciascuno un ruolo proporzionato alle proprie capacità e competenze.²¹ Proprio a tale concezione di democrazia ἀληθής Mecenate affianca una forma di *ἐλευθερία* ἀσφαλής («libertà sicura») promotrice di moderazione (τό τε σώφρον πανταχοῦ προτιμῶσα) e di equità commisurata al merito (τὸ ἴσον ἅπασι κατὰ τὴν ἀξίαν ἀπονέμουσα). Da ultimo, essa è contrapposta alla libertà delle masse (ἡ τοῦ ὄχλου ἐλευθερία), ritenuta «la forma più amara di schiavitù» (δουλεία πικροτάτη) in rapporto alla «parte migliore della *civitas*» (τοῦ βελτίστου).²²

L'attestazione di una connessione tra democrazia e *ἐλευθερία*²³ è presente anche nell'intervento di Agrippa, il 'difensore' della

²⁰ È significativo che il nesso compaia anche in 47.39.1, nel contesto della battaglia di Filippi (42 a.C.).

²¹ Cass. Dio 52.14.3 τὴν διοίκησιν τῶν κοινῶν ἑαυτῷ τε καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις τοῖς ἀρίστοις προσθεῖναι, ἵνα βουλευώσι μὲν οἱ φρονιμώτατοι, ἄρχωσι δὲ οἱ στρατηγικώτατοι, στρατεύονται δὲ καὶ μισθοφορῶσιν οἱ τε ἰσχυρότατοι καὶ οἱ πενέστατοι (Affida la gestione degli affari comuni a te stesso e agli altri tra i migliori, affinché deliberino i più saggi, assumano ruoli di comando i più idonei, combattano come soldati e come mercenari i più forti e i più poveri).

²² Cass. Dio 52.14.5.

²³ Cass. Dio 52.3-4; cf. 9.3 e 4. Sul punto Espinosa Ruiz 1982, 81; Bellissime 2016, 532, 535.

δημοκρατία nel dibattito del libro 52. Egli si fa sostenitore di un regime ispirato all'ἰσωνομία, garante della migliore forma possibile di giustizia.²⁴ Protagonisti di un simile sistema di governo sono, per Agrippa, coloro che condividono medesima natura, origini, istituzioni, leggi, dedizione alla *res publica* e che, proprio per tale ragione, ambiscono a fruire in pari grado dei privilegi e dei vantaggi comuni della *civitas*.²⁵ La forma di governo elogiata da Agrippa sembra dunque configurarsi non tanto come un regime egualitario in termini assoluti, quanto come un sistema 'timocratico' che privilegia il criterio dell'uguaglianza proporzionale sia nella partecipazione attiva agli affari comuni, sia nel godimento dei benefici economici e sociali che da tale partecipazione derivano.²⁶ egli pone l'accento, difatti, sull'ὁμοτιμία che contraddistingue una simile forma di governo – un aspetto evidente, in particolare, nella trattazione della giustizia.²⁷ La concezione di δημοκρατία sostenuta da Agrippa si tinge, pertanto, di toni apertamente aristocratici: come egli afferma, disvelando la reale natura del regime da lui elogiato, ἰσογονία ἰσομοιρίας ὀριγνᾶται.²⁸

In definitiva, i passi esaminati, per quanto pertinenti a contesti differenti, aderiscono a un pensiero organico e coerente: la *libertas*/ἐλευθερία, portato della (vera) δημοκρατία, è concepita da Cassio Dione come la possibilità di espletare diritti e doveri in sicurezza e libertà, in proporzione al merito e alla τιμή di ciascun *civis*. Già le parole di Cass. Dio 6.23.5 (M. 45, p. 154), che per Boissevain andrebbero attribuite, se non proprio allo stesso storico, a quelle di un discorso da lui messo in bocca a un personaggio appartenente al *milieu* della *nobilitas* repubblicana,²⁹ concordano con tale concezione 'ottimate' di δημοκρατία, la quale si rifà al paradigma classico³⁰ dell'ugua-

²⁴ Cass. Dio 52.4.1 ἡ μὲν τοίνυν ἰσωνομία τό τε πρόσρημα εὐώνυμον καὶ τὸ ἔργον δικαιοτάτον ἔχει (L'uguaglianza davanti alla legge ha un nome di buon auspicio e assicura la migliore forma di giustizia).

²⁵ Cass. Dio 52.4.1-3: τὴν τε γὰρ φύσιν τὴν αὐτὴν τινὰς εἰληχότας καὶ ὁμοφύλους ἀλλήλοις ὄντας, ἔν τε τοῖς αὐτοῖς ἡθεσι τεθραμμένους καὶ ἐν τοῖς ὁμοίοις νόμοις πεπαιδευμένους, καὶ κοινὴν καὶ τὴν τῶν σωμάτων καὶ τὴν τῶν ψυχῶν χρῆσιν τῇ πατρίδι παρέχοντας, πῶς μὲν οὐ δίκαιον καὶ τὰλλα πάντα κοινοῦσθαι, πῶς δ' οὐκ ἄριστον ἐν μηδενὶ πλὴν ἀπ' ἀρετῆς προτιμᾶσθαι; (Non sarebbe giusto che quanti abbiano ricevuto in sorte medesima natura, appartengano alla stessa razza, siano stati allevati secondo uguali costumi e educati secondo leggi identiche, abbiano sacrificato per la patria corpo e anima, condividano anche tutto il resto? La cosa migliore possibile non sarebbe distinguersi in nulla se non nella virtù?). Cf. §§ 6-8.

²⁶ In questo senso, appare più nitido anche il nesso istituito da Agrippa tra servizio militare e contribuzione fiscale: Cass. Dio 52.6.5. Cf. France 2016, 778-80.

²⁷ Cass. Dio 7.5.

²⁸ Cass. Dio 52.4.3.

²⁹ Boissevain 1895, *ad loc.*: «haec in oratione cuiusvis optimatium dici potuerunt, e. gr. Appii Claudii [...], nisi Dioni ipsi adscribere malis».

³⁰ Vd. Aalders 1986, 298-9.

gianza distributiva: ὅτι δημοκρατία ἐστὶν οὐ τὸ πάντας τῶν αὐτῶν ἀπλῶς τυγχάνειν, ἀλλὰ τὸ <τὰ> κατ' ἄξιαν ἕκαστον φέρεσθαι (La democrazia non consiste nell'ottenere ciascuno ogni cosa indistintamente, ma nel fatto che ognuno riceva qualcosa in base al merito).³¹

È allora lecito domandarsi, in tale prospettiva, chi siano i principali interlocutori di una simile dialettica politico-istituzionale nel periodo del principato. Se è vero che Cassio Dione interpreta la *libertas* di cui la δημοκρατία è latrice in senso timocratico-aristocratico,³² essi possono essere identificati con i membri della *nobilitas* tradizionale, l'aristocrazia senatorio-equestre, in cui si può riconoscere, in ultima analisi, la *pars* migliore della *civitas* che rischia di essere oppressa dalla *licentia* delle masse (52.14.5). Principali attori politici di tale sfondo teorico, rielaborato con originalità da Cassio Dione sulla base di matrici di pensiero classiche³³ per rispondere a istanze in-

31 Cf. la definizione di δημοκρατία messa in bocca a Catulo in Cass. Dio 36.32. 1 καὶ γὰρ εἴτε τιμὴν τοῖς ἀξιουμένοις αὐτοῦ φέρεῖ, πᾶσιν αὐτῆς, οἷς γε ἐπιβάλλει, προσήκει τυγχάνειν (τούτο γὰρ ἐστὶν ἡ δημοκρατία), εἴτε κάματον, καὶ τούτου πρὸς τὸ μέρος πάντας μεταλαμβάνειν δεῖ (τούτο γὰρ ἐστὶν ἡ ἰσομοιρία) (Se infatti [scil. una carica] conferisce onore a quanti ne siano ritenuti degni, è opportuno che la ottengano tutti quanti coloro ai quali spetta – è questa, infatti, la δημοκρατία –, se invece arreca pericolo, è necessario che tutti facciano la propria parte – in questo consiste l'isomoiria). Si osservi come già Cicerone in *Rep.* 1.54 delinea un legame forte tra *aequitas*, forma di governo e distribuzione delle cariche: *cum enim par habetur honos summis et infimis, qui sint in omni populo necesse est, ipsa aequitas iniquissima est; quod in iis civitatibus quae ab optimis reguntur accidere non potest* (Allorquando infatti toccano pari cariche ai migliori e ai peggiori, i quali è inevitabile che esistano in ogni compagine sociale, la stessa uguaglianza diventa assai iniqua; la qual cosa, in quelle città che sono rette dai migliori, non è possibile che accada). Si tratta di una riflessione da leggere di concerto con la nozione di *gradus dignitatis* espressa da Cicerone in *Rep.* 1.43: il passo, ispirato al pensiero greco classico (vd. recentemente Landolfi 2017, part. 460 ss.), evidenzia i difetti di un regime democratico puro – *omnia per populum geruntur* –, surclassato in termini di *aequitas/aequabilitas* (tratto distintivo della costituzione mista: 1.69) dal regime degli *optimi* (cf. Arena 2012, 97-8 e 101-2 sulla preminenza dell'elemento aristocratico nella costituzione mista propugnata da Cicerone). In quest'ottica si potrebbe affermare che l'accezione di δημοκρατία esposta da Catulo nel passo dioneo sopra ricordato e nel frammento del libro sesto aderisce a tale modello 'ottimate', laddove al criterio del *gradus dignitatis* corrisponde quello della partecipazione alla cosa pubblica (attraverso l'assunzione delle cariche) κατ'ἄξιαν. Auspichiamo di poter approfondire tali suggestioni nelle prossime ricerche.

32 Cf. Millar 1964, 74 a proposito di Cass. Dio 56.43.1: «Here δημοκρατία has no philosophical overtones but simply refers to a state of affairs in which order and due social distinctions were preserved and Republican institutions functioned».

33 La dicotomia tra μοναρχία e δημοκρατία (ferma restando la risemantizzazione di questo termine nella *Storia Romana*, dove esso indica il regime della *nobilitas* in forze nel periodo repubblicano: *supra*, nota 14) pare d'ispirazione platonica: Plat. *Leg.* 3.693d-e εἰσὶν πολιτεῖων οἷον μητέρες δύο τινές, ἐξ ὧν τὰς ἄλλας γεγρονέναι λέγων ἂν τις ὀρθῶς λέγοι, καὶ τὴν μὲν προσαγορεύειν μοναρχίαν ὀρθόν, τὴν δ' αὖ δημοκρατίαν [...]. δεῖ δὲ οὖν καὶ ἀναγκαῖον μεταλαβεῖν ἀμφοῖν τούτοις, εἴτερ ἑλευθερία τ' ἔσται καὶ φιλία μετὰ φρονήσεως: ὁ δὲ βούλεται ἡμῖν ὁ λόγος προστάττει, λέγων ὡς οὐκ ἂν ποτε τούτων πόλις ἄμοιρος γενομένη πολιτευθῇναι δύναται' ἂν καλῶς (Esistono, per così dire, due madri delle 'costituzioni', dalle quali potremmo dire a buon diritto che le altre sono nate, e queste potremmo chiamarle giustamente monarchia l'una, democrazia l'altra. [...]).

terpretative a lui attuali,³⁴ sono, in conclusione, i *principes*, titolari della μοναρχία, e l'aristocrazia imperiale, beneficiaria della residuale componente repubblicana preservata dalla μίξις 'costituzionale'. La prospettiva elitaria (quella della *nobilitas* senatoria, cui apparteneva) condivisa da Cassio Dione, avverso alla tirannide tanto degli imperatori despoti, quanto dell'ὄχλος (52.14.5), si coglie precipuamente nell'esaltazione di una *libertas* non già indiscriminata, ma, al contrario, moderata, garantita dalla mescolanza tra μοναρχία e δημοκρατία³⁵ intesa nel senso che abbiamo visto. Guardando soprattutto alla condizione e alle aspettative della classe politica di appartenenza, Cassio Dione auspica pertanto un regime lontano dagli abusi dei *principes*-tiranni e dall'arroganza dell'ὄχλος, un termine della tradizione classica dietro cui può essere scorta un'allusione non soltanto alla *turba* amorfa, ma anche alle soldatesche³⁶ della cui arroganza egli fece personale esperienza.³⁷

Bisogna ed è necessario, quindi, attingere a entrambe, se dovrà realizzarsi la libertà e l'amicizia insieme alla saggezza: è questo ciò che il nostro discorso intende prescrivere, affermando che non potrà mai una città essere retta bene se non partecipa di queste due forme di governo». Come già rilevato da Carsana 1990, 94, Cassio Dione potrebbe aver derivato il modello platonico dalla lettura delle *Vite Parallele* plutarchee (in specie, dalle biografie di Licurgo e di Dione), ove compaiono riferimenti a tale paradigma.

34 Ad esempio, mi sembra significativo che la riflessione dionea sul principato presenti accenti congruenti con idee espresse dall'imperatore Marco Aurelio che, in Aur. I, 14, afferma di aver concepito l'idea di una forma di governo (πολιτεία) fondata sui principi di ἰσονομία, ἰσότης, ἰσηγορία: una monarchia che abbia come obiettivo la libertà di tutti i governati (βασιλείας τιμώσης πάντων μάλιστα τὴν ἐλευθερίαν τῶν ἀρχομένων). Si tratta di concetti che informano il sostrato teorico sotteso al libro 52; la consonanza tra le visioni espresse da Cassio Dione e i pensieri dell'imperatore sono indizio di un ulteriore punto di contatto tra la realtà in cui opera lo storico e la gestazione della sua opera. Inoltre, un altro contemporaneo di Cassio Dione, Filostrato, si fa portavoce di concetti analoghi riguardo alla nozione di monarchia come forma di governo 'democratico': in V. A. 5.35.4, il governo di un monarca, quando rivolto all'utilità comune, è assimilato al governo del popolo: ὥσπερ γὰρ εἰς ἀρετῇ προύχων μεθίστησι τὴν δημοκρατίαν ἐς τὸ ἐνὸς ἀνδρὸς τοῦ ἀρίστου ἀρχὴν φαίνεσθαι, οὕτως ἡ ἐνὸς ἀρχὴ πάντα ἐς τὸ ζυμφερόν τοῦ κοινού προορώσα δῆμὸς ἐστίν (Infatti, come quando un individuo che si distingue per virtù trasforma il governo del popolo facendolo apparire il governo di uno solo, il migliore, così il governo di uno solo che guardi in tutto e per tutto al bene comune è il governo del popolo).

35 Di contro, Cassio Dione si esprime in maniera pessimistica sulla possibilità di moderazione sotto un governo repubblicano, in 44.2.4 (ἀδύνατον μὲν ἐν δημοκρατίᾳ σωφρονίσαι). Per l'analisi condotta da Cassio Dione sulla politica disfunzionale dell'età della repubblica vd. ora i numerosi contributi raccolti nel volume curato da Osgood e Baron 2019.

36 Freyburger-Galland 1997, 88 sottolinea come tale impiego si iscrive nella tradizione tucididea.

37 Sul trattamento di popolo e soldati in Cassio Dione De Blois 1997. Per la biografia dello storico vd. gli studi citati *supra*, nota 4.

3 I criteri ordinatori della narrazione nei 'libri imperiali'

La predilezione dionea per una costituzione di tipo misto (incardinata sullo schema binario μοναρχία-δημοκρατία),³⁸ capace di assicurare ordine e libertà ai *cives*, suggerisce l'impiego, da parte dello storico, di una scala di giudizio che guarda a tale preciso *framework* ideologico. Esso giunge fino a condizionare la scansione narrativa dell'opera, come si cercherà di dimostrare nelle pagine che seguono.

Specialmente nelle sezioni iniziali dei 'libri imperiali' è infatti possibile circoscrivere porzioni di testo organizzate secondo un principio eminentemente tematico, mirante a fornire una rassegna degli aspetti più salienti dei governi imperiali cui la narrazione è dedicata; queste sono state descritte da Cesare Questa come «parti aneddotico-biografiche»³⁹ e sarebbero improntate, secondo lo studioso, alle perdute *Vite* imperiali di Plutarco.⁴⁰

Con l'obiettivo di rivalutarne la funzione nell'economia compositiva della *Storia Romana*, occorrerebbe domandarsi, in questa sede, quali siano i criteri ordinatori sottesi all'organizzazione di tali segmenti di testo. A tal fine, può essere utile considerare un passo di conte-

³⁸ Vd. *supra* nota 33.

³⁹ Questa 1963, 268. In anni più recenti, dopo lo studio descrittivo di Harrington 1970, cap. IV (*Dio as Biographer*), un più convincente modello esplicativo del metodo narrativo dioneo è stato proposto da Pelling 1970, 118 («biostructure»). Secondo lo studioso, Cassio Dione avrebbe integrato il metodo annalistico con l'inserzione di elementi biografici concernenti una figura dominante nell'economia del racconto storico, non necessariamente imperniato attorno al solo imperatore: esso può anche gravitare nell'orbita di figure in grado di esercitare una certa influenza sullo svolgimento delle dinamiche di potere dei singoli periodi interessati.

⁴⁰ A dire il vero non è sempre possibile circoscrivere, per ciascun libro, le cosiddette sezioni 'aneddotico-biografiche'; altrettanto vero è che lo stato estremamente lacunoso in cui è pervenuta l'opera dionea nelle parti dedicate alla storia imperiale impedisce di cogliere fino in fondo la veste originale della *Storia Romana*, scoraggiando indagini troppo sistematiche sotto il profilo compositivo. Difatti, le sole sezioni 'aneddotico-biografiche' integralmente attestate dalla tradizione manoscritta sono quelle pertinenti al principato di Tiberio (l. 57) Caligola (l. 59) e Claudio (l. 60). Inoltre, malgrado la porzione dell'opera sopravvissuta nei mss. giunga fino al sessantesimo libro, nemmeno i libri sopra elencati esulano da porzioni frammentarie – com'è noto, il Marciiano Veneto 395 si arresta, tra varie interruzioni, a 60.28.3 (46 d.C.), né dal Vaticano Greco 1288, fonte di tradizione diretta per i libri 79(78) 2.2-80(79).8.3, a causa delle sue profonde lacune, è possibile trarre conclusioni più sicure sulla struttura compositiva dei libri contemporanei. Non va poi dimenticato che Xifilino epitomò l'opera dionea seguendo uno schema biografico (Mallan 2013 ne analizza stile e metodo storiografico). D'altro canto, non si ha a mio avviso motivo di dubitare eccessivamente della paternità dionea delle informazioni contenute nelle sezioni di nostro interesse quando conservate nella sola versione epitomata, proprio perché esse si trovano già nelle parti conservate della *Storia Romana*. Un discorso diverso vale per gli *Excerpta Constantiniana*, che, benché non privi di una *ratio* propria (Mallan 2019), tendono in generale a aderire più fedelmente al testo dioneo (Millar 1964, 1-2; cf. Molin 2004 per l'ultima decade dell'opera). Infatti, le porzioni giunte in escerto forniscono assai spesso materiale prezioso in questo senso.

nuto metodologico scarsamente approfondito in questa prospettiva:

Cass. Dio 46.35.1 Ἐς τοῦτο μὲν δὴ τότε τὰ τῶν Ῥωμαίων πράγματα προήχθη, λέξω δὲ καὶ καθ' ἕκαστον τῶν γενομένων· καὶ γὰρ καὶ παιδείουσιν ἐν τούτῳ τὰ μάλιστα εἶναι μοι δοκεῖ, ὅταν τις τὰ ἔργα τοῖς λογισμοῖς ὑπολέγων τὴν τε ἐκείνων φύσιν ἐκ τούτων ἐλέγχι καὶ τούτους ἐκ τῆς ἐκείνων ὁμολογίας τεκμηριοῖ.

A Roma, dunque, la situazione era giunta a questo punto, ma racconterò ora i fatti uno ad uno: mi sembra che il vantaggio consista soprattutto in questo, qualora prendendo come base per i ragionamenti le azioni si esamini la natura di quelle [*scil.* delle azioni] attraverso questi [*scil.* i ragionamenti] e si dia prova di questi ultimi attraverso la concordanza con quelle.

Il passo fa da ponte tra una digressione sul comportamento del senato nei confronti di Antonio e Ottaviano, e il racconto particolareggiato della guerra di Modena (43 a.C.). Qui, lo storico sviluppa una riflessione sul mutamento della forma di governo che aveva investito la *res publica*, ora tramutatasi in una *δυναστεία*,⁴¹ termine che sembra alludere, in questo contesto, al periodo del 'secondo' triumvirato e, in particolare, ai potentati dei *δυνάσται* Antonio e Ottaviano. L'*excursus*, facendo da premessa alla narrazione evenemenziale, prelude alla descrizione degli avvenimenti relativi alla frattura della *concordia* nella *civitas*, provocata dall'incostanza dei *patres*, cui lo storico attribuisce la colpa della degenerazione della forma di governo repubblicana, avendo essi consegnato la città all'arbitrio instabile ora di uno, ora dell'altro contendente.⁴² Cassio Dione, dunque, premette alla narrazione dei fatti un ragionamento a monte, relativo in specie alla condotta politica dei senatori e alle ragioni del collasso della forma di governo della *res publica*, onde rivolgersi alla descrizione degli avvenimenti dell'inverno 44-43 a.C., a partire dall'assedio di Antonio presso Modena.

I λογισμοί esposti da Cassio Dione nel capitolo 34 costituiscono, insomma, la spiegazione ragionata degli ἔργα che egli si appresta a narrare nei capitoli successivi: questi definiscono la base del ragionamento (ὑπολέγειν), la cui correttezza, volta a esplicitare la natura dei fatti, deve essere avvalorata attraverso la concordanza con la realtà storica. In ragione del suo contenuto metodologico, di portata programmatica, il ragionamento qui sviluppato da Cassio Dio-

⁴¹ Cass. Dio 46.34.4 τὸν τε δῆμον καταλυθῆναι καὶ δυναστείαν τινὰ γενέσθαι. Sulla nozione di *δυναστεία* in Cassio Dione vd. ora Carsana 2016 (che, oltre a sottolineare la polisemia del termine, ne individua gli antecedenti) e *contra* Lindholmer 2018 (dove si cerca di spogliare il termine da accezioni 'costituzionali'; il passo dioneo qui citato non è discusso).

⁴² Cass. Dio 46.34.1.

ne può essere sganciato dal contesto evenemenziale a cui pertiene: se l'interpretazione che qui se ne è proposta è corretta, è dunque possibile ritenere che Cassio Dione attribuisce agli ἔργα, ai fatti (e pertanto anche agli aneddoti) un valore dimostrativo-esemplificativo non secondario, anche al fine di elaborare riflessioni – i λογισμοί cui si fa riferimento in 46.35.1 – di natura squisitamente politico-istituzionale (nel caso specifico, si tratta infatti di decifrare le cause della degenerazione della forma di governo della *res publica*).

Tenendo conto di questa riflessione metodologica⁴³ può essere interessante verificare in quale misura se ne possa riscontrare l'applicazione anche nelle porzioni 'aneddotico-biografiche' dei libri imperiali. A riguardo, è rilevante che le sezioni di testo in questione siano spesso contraddistinte, a mo' di riepilogo, da espressioni di tipo formulare, in alcuni casi analoghe a quella già attestata in 46.35.1 (λέξω δὲ καὶ καθ' ἕκαστον τῶν γενομένων); esse sono pure connotate da una precisa terminologia pertinente alla descrizione della condotta imperiale, com'è possibile osservare dalla lettura dei seguenti passi:

Tiberio

57.7.1

καὶ ἐν τοῖςδε αὐτὴν τρόπῳ, ἐφ' ὅσον ὁ Γερμανικὸς ἔζη, διήγαγεν.
E, fino a quando Germanico fu in vita, si attenne alla medesima condotta.

57.8.1

καὶ τὰλλα δὲ πάντα κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν τοῦτον τρόπον ἐποίει.
E compì molte altre azioni secondo la medesima maniera d'agire.

57.13.6-14.1

ταῦθ' οὕτω πάντα μέχρι γε καὶ ὁ Γερμανικὸς ἔζη ἐποίει. [...]. λέξω δὲ καὶ κατὰ τοὺς καιροὺς ὡς ἕκαστα ἐγένετο, ὅσα γε καὶ μνήμης ἄξιά ἐστιν.

Compì tutte queste azioni fino a quando visse Germanico: [...].
Esporrò ora singolarmente le cose che accadde secondo il criterio annalistico, quante sono degne di essere ricordate.

43 Cf. Hose 1994, 423 («deduktiven Denkens»); cfr. ora Markov 2020, 248. Per Lintott 1997, 2499-500: «here, unlike Polybius and Dionysius, Cassius Dio is justifying the narrative, not the explanation of the underlying causes which he has already given». Per Millar 1964, 45, invece, il passo si atterrebbe a una visione tradizionale, analoga alla formulazione di Sempronio Asellione (ap. Gell. 5.18). Tale principio interpretativo non sarebbe comunque applicato da Cassio Dione, nella cui opera mancherebbero «large-scale interpretations».

Caligola

59.3.1

τῷ δ' αὐτῷ τούτῳ τρόπῳ καὶ ἐς ἄλλα πάντα ὡς εἶπεῖν ἐχρήτο.
Si attenne allo stesso modo di fare, per così dire, in ogni circostanza.

Claudio

60.3.1

λέξω δὲ καὶ καθ' ἕκαστον ὧν ἐποίησε.
Racconterò ora singolarmente i suoi atti.

60.8.4

ταῦτα μὲν οὖν αὐτοῦ τε τοῦ Κλαυδίου ἔργα ἦν καὶ ὑφ' ἀπάντων ἐπηνεῖτο: ἐπράχθη δὲ καὶ ἄλλα ἄττα τότε, οὐχ ὁμοιότροπα.
Questi, dunque, furono gli atti compiuti da Claudio e perciò fu lodato da tutti: ma allora compì anche altre azioni, non conformi al medesimo modo di agire.

Nerone

61.6.1⁴⁴

τοιοῦτος μὲν τὸ σύμπαν ὁ Νέρων ἐγένετο, λέξω δὲ καὶ καθ' ἕκαστον.
In sintesi, Nerone visse in questo modo, esporrò ora singolarmente i fatti.

63(62).22.1:⁴⁵

Ὁ μὲν οὖν Νέρων οὕτω τε ἔζη καὶ οὕτως ἐμονάρχει, λέξω δὲ καὶ ὅπως κατελύθη καὶ ἐκ τῆς ἀρχῆς ἐξέπεσεν.
Nerone, dunque, visse e governò in questo modo, dirò ora in che modo fu rovesciato e scalzato dal governo dell'impero.

Adriano

69.8.1

ταῦτα περί γε τοῦ τρόπου, ὡς ἐν κεφαλαίῳ εἶπεῖν, προείρηκα· λέξω δὲ καὶ τὰ καθ' ἕκαστον, ὅσα ἀναγκαῖόν ἐστι μνημονεύεσθαι.
Per riassumere, ho detto queste cose riguardo alla sua condotta: esporrò ora singolarmente quanto è degno di essere consegnato alla memoria.

⁴⁴ Xiph. 149, 30-150, 10 R. St.

⁴⁵ Xiph. 182, 6-8 R. St.

Caracalla

78(77).11.4

τὸ μὲν οὖν σύμπαν τοιοῦτος ἦν.

Dunque, in generale, era così.

Macrino

79(78).16.1 (passo estremamente lacunoso)

ταῦτα μὲν <...> κατ' αὐτὸν α <...> εἴρηταί μοι ἐν <...> ὥς ἕκαστα <...> μῆς τινος <...>.

Queste cose <...> su di lui <...> sono state dette da me <...> ciascuno <...> (quante siano degne di memoria? = [μνη]μῆς τινος).

Come si può notare, sia i sostantivi sia i verbi utilizzati nei contesti sopra citati (ἔργα, τρόπος, πράσσω, διάγω, ποιέω, γίγνομαι, χράομαι, ζάω, μοναρχέω) denotano il modo in cui i singoli imperatori svolsero il proprio ruolo nella gestione dell'impero: essi non indicano, cioè, il loro modo di essere - ἦθος - ma il loro modo di agire in una dimensione pubblica, piuttosto che privata. In tal senso, di particolare interesse risulta il sostantivo τρόπος quando riferito alla condotta politica dei *principes*, illustrata attraverso un ordinamento per temi che lascia spazio in un secondo momento al racconto annalistico. Analogo impiego si trova già in 46.33.6, dove l'espressione τὸν Σύλλειον τρόπον⁴⁶ non si riferisce di certo alle inclinazioni caratteriali di Sila, ma precisamente al suo più noto ed emblematico lascito politico, le proscrizioni.⁴⁷ Parimenti, anche in un *excerptum* del libro 22 (76, 1 = EV 65) le modalità di gestione della politica interna (ἡρξεν) messe in pratica da Lucio Mummio e da Scipione Emiliano, censori nel 142 a.C., vengono illustrate attraverso una σύγκρισις in cui è impiegato il medesimo lemma.⁴⁸ Quando riferiti agli imperatori, i sostantivi ἔργα e τρόπος suggeriscono pertanto che l'interesse di Cassio Dione è rivolto alla storia nel suo svolgimento concreto: non sono tanto i tratti caratteriali o psicologici dei *principes* a costituire il fulcro d'interesse delle sezioni aneddotico-biografiche, quanto invece la loro condotta nell'amministrazione attiva dell'impero,⁴⁹ a par-

⁴⁶ Cass. Dio 46.33.6.

⁴⁷ Per cui vd. il fr. 109.6-21 = EV 121-123.

⁴⁸ Fr. 76.1 = EV 65, su cui Urso 2013, *ad loc.*

⁴⁹ Il lemma è attestato anche in due ulteriori frr. dal contesto incerto: 110.4 e 111.2, dove sembra di doversi attribuire uguale significato. Rilevante anche l'occorrenza in 52.5.4, dove il sostantivo τρόπος, accostato all'espressione κανὼν τοῦ βίου (discorso di Agrippa), fa allusione al modo di governare del τύραννος. Periodizzazione e *narrative modes* della *Storia Romana* di Cassio Dione sono analizzati da Kemezis 2014, 94-149; Coltelloni-Tranoy 2016a, 361-2; per un confronto con Tacito Devillers 2016.

tire dalla quale desumere una visione d'insieme in un'ottica senz'altro politica. Indicativo in questo senso è Cass. Dio 66.9.4, dove un aneddoto imbarazzante su Domiziano si rivela, secondo Cassio Dione, sintomatico del suo futuro modo di governare:⁵⁰

Cass. Dio 66.9.4 Ἐν γοῦν τῷ Ἀλβανῶ χωρίῳ τὰ πλεῖστα διάγων ἄλλα τε πολλὰ καὶ γελοῖα ἔπραττε, καὶ τὰς μνίας γραφεῖσις κατεκέντει. Τοῦτο γὰρ εἰ καὶ ἀνάξιον τοῦ τῆς ἱστορίας ὄγκου ἐστίν, ἀλλ' ὅτι γε ἱκανῶς τὸν τρόπον αὐτοῦ ἐνδείκνυται, ἀναγκαιῶς ἔγραψα, καὶ μάλιστα ὅτι καὶ μοναρχήσας ὁμοίως αὐτὸ ἐποίει.

Trascorrendo la maggior parte del tempo nel territorio di Alba, si dedicava ad ogni genere più ridicolo di passatempo, tra cui infilzare le mosche con uno stilo. Sebbene questo fatto sia, invero, indegno della grandezza della storia, poiché tuttavia manifesta chiaramente il suo modo di fare l'ho inserito a ragione, soprattutto perché anche quando assunse il potere imperiale si comportò allo stesso modo.

In una certa misura, una prima occorrenza di questo schema narrativo è rilevabile in 53.22.1, dove Cassio Dione, dopo aver esposto in chiave diacronica le più importanti novità della forma di governo inaugurata da Augusto,⁵¹ afferma di riprendere la narrazione secondo l'ordinamento annalistico:

Cass. Dio 53.22.1 Τὸ μὲν οὖν σύμπαν οὕτω τὴν ἀρχὴν διώκησε, λέξω δὲ καὶ καθ' ἕκαστον ὅσα ἀναγκαῖόν ἐστι μετὰ τῶν ὑπάτων, ἐφ' ὧν ἐγένετο, μνημονεύεσθαι.

In generale, dunque, egli amministrò l'impero in questo modo, esporrò ora singolarmente ogni cosa degna di essere ricordata insieme al nome dei consoli sotto cui si è verificata [scil. secondo il metodo annalistico].

⁵⁰ Cf. Suet. *Dom.* 3 e Aur. Vict. *caes.* 11.5, che non si premurano di dare una giustificazione. In questo senso cf. l'impiego del medesimo sostantivo in 73(72).11.2. Per altre attestazioni (ma meno pertinenti) vd. 61.11.2 e 4; 74(73).11.4.

⁵¹ La digressione passa in rassegna tutte le più importanti prerogative dell'imperatore con attenzione alla contemporaneità. Capp. 12-15: amministrazione delle *provinciae*; 16.1-3: gestione dei *milites* e delle finanze; prolungamento dell'*imperium* augustiniano sulle province; 16.4-18: onori, titoli, incarichi conferiti ai *principes*; 21.1-6: attività legislativa e cognitoria in collaborazione con il senato; 21.6-7: modalità di elezione e attribuzione delle magistrature.

A proposito di tale schema narrativo, si può infine osservare come il proemio plutarco⁵² che apre la *Vita di Galba* presenti talune affinità con la perifrasi formulare poc'anzi illustrata:

Plut. *Galb.* 2.5 τὰ μὲν οὖν καθ' ἕκαστα τῶν γενομένων ἀπαγγέλλειν ἀκριβῶς τῆς πραγματικῆς ἱστορίας ἐστίν, ὅσα δὲ ἄξια λόγου τοῖς τῶν Καισάρων ἔργοις καὶ πάθεσι συμπίπτωκεν, οὐδὲ ἐμοὶ προσήκει παρελθεῖν.

Mentre riferire i fatti uno a uno in maniera accurata è compito proprio della storiografia pragmatica, non mi si addice tralasciare quanto sia degno di essere narrato tra le azioni e le vicende patite dagli imperatori.

Plutarco sembra distinguere contenuti e scopi della propria opera biografica in rapporto alla storiografia pragmatica d'ispirazione polibiana (ὁ τῆς πραγματικῆς ἱστορίας τρόπος),⁵³ il cui compito consisterebbe nell'esposizione accurata dei singoli fatti: τὰ μὲν οὖν καθ' ἕκαστα τῶν γενομένων. Tale perifrasi, impiegata da Plutarco per qualificare i caratteri della storiografia pragmatica è affine alla perifrasi già riscontrata in Cass. Dio 46.35.1 (καθ' ἕκαστον τῶν γενομένων), che, per quanto di per sé poco originale, ricorre con insistenza nei libri imperiali della *Storia Romana*; tale reiterazione fa di essa una sorta di sintagma formulare e ne accentua la funzione programmatica. Non è dunque da escludere che, attraverso il suo impiego ripetuto in specie nei libri imperiali, Cassio Dione abbia voluto fare allusione alla classificazione presente nel proemio plutarco, intendendo segnalare in questo modo che la sua *Storia Romana* avrebbe contemplato proprio quanto il biografo di Cheronea dichiarava di tralasciare. Pertanto, ammesso che vi sia continuità tra la *Storia Romana* e le *Vite imperiali* plutarchee, occorrerebbe valutarne il rapporto non tanto in termini di semplice dipendenza – ovvero, quale fonte cui la prima attinge, come voleva Questa –, quanto piuttosto di integrazione e, si direbbe, di superamento, giacché le due opere, prefiggendosi obiettivi differenti, puntano a diversi livelli di narrazione storica, tanto sotto il profilo dei contenuti quanto dal punto di vista dell'articolazione compositiva.

In ultima analisi, stando all'interpretazione del metodo di lavoro dioneo poc'anzi prospettata, è allora possibile considerare le 'sezioni aneddotico-biografiche' come il momento in cui la condotta e le pratiche di governo imperiali sono passate al vaglio secondo una rifles-

⁵² Sul tema Giannattasio 2006, ove ulteriore bibliografia. Un prospetto dei confronti possibili tra Plutarco e Cassio Dione è in Martinelli 2000.

⁵³ Polyb. 1.2.8; 9.2.4. Sul rapporto – 'aporetico' – tra Polibio e Cassio Dione, Foulon 2016.

sione di natura politica (λογισμοί), compiuta attraverso il supporto dei fatti (ἔργα), siano pure essi aneddotici, ordinati secondo un criterio tematico. Esse fungono, di conseguenza, da spazio di riflessione dedicato alle concrete prassi di governo del *princeps*.

Ma in quale misura tale articolazione narrativa, imperniata attorno alle 'sezioni aneddottico-biografiche', si coniuga con la particolare concezione che Cassio Dione ha del principato, nella sua forma ottimale, come costituzione mista?

4 La *civilitas principis*

Come si è cercato di dimostrare in occasione di uno studio dedicato ai capitoli 7-14 del libro 57, questi formano un *cluster* narrativo, dedicato alle prassi di governo imperiali, deputato a introdurre il racconto annalistico sul principato di Tiberio (ll. 57-58); la trama narrativa dei capitoli in questione risponde a una precisa visione del ruolo del *princeps* nella compagine politica imperiale, la quale è riconducibile al modulo interpretativo della *civilitas principis*.⁵⁴ Benché tale nozione sia stata interpretata secondo diversi approcci,⁵⁵ vi è consenso nell'identificare il *princeps civilis* con il *princeps* filosenatorio,⁵⁶ ovvero con il *princeps* che adotti una prassi di governo conservatrice in rapporto ai privilegi della *nobilitas* tradizionale. Il concetto di *civilitas*, trasposto in lingua greca per mezzo degli aggettivi δημοκρατικός/δημοτικός,⁵⁷ corradicali del sostantivo δημοκρατία, ricorre in Cassio Dione almeno tredici volte, cui possono essere aggiunti altri due *loci*, in cui la nozione è tradotta per mezzo di forme perifrastiche dal significato affine.⁵⁸ Sotto il profilo storiografico, si può osservare, con

⁵⁴ Bono 2018. Vd. anche Madsen e Pistellato in questo volume.

⁵⁵ Vd. nota 15.

⁵⁶ Vd. per tutti Wallace-Hadrill 1982.

⁵⁷ Scivoletto 1970, 28-9 nota 29; Wallace-Hadrill 1982, 44; Marcone 1985, 971.

⁵⁸ Δημοτικός, in forma sostantivata/aggettivale/avverbale: 37.23.3 (Pompeo); 43.11.6 (Catone Minore); 53.12.1 (Ottaviano); 57.8.3; 57.9.1 (Tiberio); 66.11.1 (Vespasiano); 74(73).3.4 e 5.1 (Pertinace); δημοκρατικός in forma aggettivale/avverbale: 45.44.1 (Antonio, cui è negata); 53.18.2 (Augusto); 55.4.2 (Augusto); 59.3.1 (Caligola). Un *hapax dioneo* (e di tutta la letteratura greca), è l'aggettivo ἀδημοκράτητα, a mio avviso equivalente della nozione di *incivilitas* (43.45.1, su Cesare). Per le forme perifrastiche (Tiberio) 57.11.3 (ὡς ἐν δημοκρατίῳ); 15.9 (τὸ τῆς δημοκρατίας σχῆμα). Escluso dal computo l'occorrenza – a mio avviso traducibile come *popularis* piuttosto che come *civilis* – in 54.29.3 (Agrippa). Se è vero che nei libri imperiali la nozione di *civilitas* non è attestata 'lessicalmente' per ciascun imperatore, nondimeno, anche laddove non occorre, la sua mancata attribuzione può essere di volta in volta giustificata: sussistono infatti tematiche indicative della sua persistente operatività (emblematico, ad es., il caso di Traiano, cui la *civilitas* sembra essere negata studiamente: la sete di – vana – gloria militare, è assimilata da Cassio Dione a quella del contemporaneo Settimio Severo). Per

Italo Lana, che la valenza politica della *civilitas* sarebbe venuta meno nella produzione storiografica latina a partire dalla seconda metà del II secolo d.C. (dopo Svetonio): tale fattore incoraggia a esaminare la *Storia Romana* dionea nell'ottica della *civilitas*⁵⁹ per apprezzarne la continuità di utilizzo e le eventuali oscillazioni di significato. Anzi, in considerazione del personale punto di vista dioneo sul principato di Augusto e della sua ottica centrata sulla collaborazione tra senato e imperatore, la *civilitas principis* potrebbe essere adottata quale criterio euristico della *Storia Romana*. Difatti, la qualità delle interazioni tra senato e imperatore risiede al cuore non soltanto della narrazione storica dionea,⁶⁰ ma anche della nozione di *civilitas*, come risulta evidente dal contenuto dei *loci* in cui il concetto è attestato.

Dovendo limitarci alla menzione di qualche esempio significativo relativo all'orizzonte cronologico cui è dedicato il presente contributo,⁶¹ si può osservare come le iniziative politiche considerate aderenti alla *civilitas* interessino specificatamente l'interazione tra imperatore e senatori, specialmente nella dimensione della politica interna: ad esempio, la *civilitas* di Augusto, Tiberio e Vespasiano si concretizza nelle modalità di amministrazione dell'attività cognitoria, promotrice di *παρηγορία* nei confronti dei *patres*;⁶² la condotta di Pertinace è qualificata come assai *civilis* in riferimento all'atteggiamento di apertura assunto verso i senatori, tra cui lo stesso Cassio Dione (ἐχρήτο δὲ καὶ ἡμῖν δημοτικώτατα);⁶³ Tiberio avrebbe promosso una linea di governo incline alla *civilitas* vietando sia l'erezione di

queste ed altre problematiche si rimanda, per motivi di spazio, alla pubblicazione della tesi di dottorato citata *infra*, nota 61.

⁵⁹ Vi fanno riferimento, oltre agli studi citati *supra*, nota 57, e.g. Soraci 1974, 48 e 102; Sion-Jenkis 2000, 152; Simons 2009, 288-90; Davenport, Mallan 2014.

⁶⁰ Sulla rappresentazione del senato in Cassio Dione, da ultimo Madsen 2019; Coudry 2020 (con particolare attenzione per l'età augustea).

⁶¹ Per una trattazione più articolata della questione sia consentito rimandare alla dissertazione dottorale di prossima pubblicazione, intitolata: *Il principato civile nella 'Ρωμαϊκή ιστορία di Cassio Dione*. Qui, uno specifico approfondimento è dedicato anche alla narrazione sulla tarda repubblica e ai contenuti del libro 52, dove, per comprendere quanto gli argomenti oggetto di discussione nel dibattito Agrippa-Mecenate facciano riferimento alla *civilitas*, non è possibile adottare le medesime spie lessicali cui si è qui accennato: gli aggettivi *δημοτικός*/*δημοκρατικός* non ricorrono mai, mentre il sostantivo corradicale *δημοκρατία* assume valori specifici in ragione del particolare sfondo concettuale del dibattito – peraltro mutevoli in funzione dell'interlocutore e del contesto. Per determinare in quale misura la nozione di *civilitas* sia operante anche nel dibattito, occorre piuttosto valutare l'accordo tra la trattazione degli argomenti discussi e i criteri di individuazione della *civilitas* enucleati attraverso la recensione dei passi in cui la nozione è attestata.

⁶² Cass. Dio 55.4.2-3 (Augusto); 57.7; 9 – *civilitas* connessa ai processi *de maiestate* (Tiberio); 66.11.1 (Vespasiano).

⁶³ Cass. Dio 74(73).3.4 (sulla questione cf. Pistellato in questo volume). Egli è poi designato pretore da Pertinace: 74(73) 12.2.

statue o templi in proprio onore (monumenti sintomatici del neonato culto imperiale), sia che il giorno del suo compleanno fosse celebrato παρά τὸ καθεστικός, sia che si giurasse sui suoi *acta*.⁶⁴ Parimenti, anche l'ambito delle prassi politiche imperiali più strettamente giuridico-istituzionali è filtrato attraverso il medesimo schema interpretativo: Tiberio è ritenuto *civilis* perché «onorava i magistrati in carica come in una *res publica* e si alzava in piedi davanti ai consoli»;⁶⁵ al principio del suo governo, Caligola fu così *civilis* da «non inviare alcuna lettera né al popolo, né al senato e da non assumere alcun titolo imperiale»;⁶⁶ Pertinace, dopo l'investitura imperiale legittimata dalla curia senatoria, assunse il titolo di *princeps senatus* «secondo l'antica tradizione» (κατὰ τὸ ἀρχαῖον), aspirando a divenire un campione di *civilitas* (ἐπὶ τῷ δημοτικὸς εἶναι βούλεσθαι).⁶⁷ evidentemente, tale titolo puntava ad accentuare, nei confronti del senato, il senso di appartenenza e di inclusione dell'imperatore nel consesso dei *patres*.

Come si evince dagli esempi appena menzionati, nell'orizzonte valoriale cui fa riferimento la nozione di *civilitas*, profondamente radicato nel rapporto dialettico tra imperatore e senatori, questi si ergono a depositari dell'antica tradizione repubblicana su cui si innesta il principato. In quest'ottica, risulta allora di particolare interesse la *civilitas* che Cassio Dione ascrive alle intenzioni di Ottaviano (βουλευθεὶς δὲ δὴ καὶ ὡς δημοτικός τις εἶναι δόξαι)⁶⁸ in occasione della riforma dell'amministrazione provinciale (13 gennaio del 27 a.C.), appena dopo il discorso di *recusatio* della monarchia.⁶⁹ Qui, a ben vedere, Cassio Dione non sembra ritenere sincera la condotta *civilis* ostentata da Ottaviano, a causa degli obiettivi che egli si sarebbe prefisso: rendere i senatori inermi (essi venivano peraltro privati, così, di una serie di privilegi tradizionali – quali la celebrazione del trionfo) aggiogandoli al superiore potenziale bellico dell'imperatore; assicurarsi la lealtà delle legioni, del cui sostentamento, lui solo, si sarebbe curato (αὐτὸς δὲ δὴ μόνος καὶ ὅπλα ἔχη καὶ στρατιώτας τρέφει).⁷⁰ Sono proprio questi due aspetti (controllo dell'esercito e delle risorse economiche) a favorire il consolidamento della monarchia

⁶⁴ Cass. Dio 57.8.3 e 9.1.

⁶⁵ Cass. Dio 57.11.3.

⁶⁶ Cass. Dio 59.3.1.

⁶⁷ Cass. Dio 74(73).5.1.

⁶⁸ Cass. Dio 53.12.1.

⁶⁹ Cass. Dio 53.3-10.

⁷⁰ Cass. Dio 53.12.3-4. La correlazione (tucididea: Rich 1990, 15-16) λόγῳ μὲν [...] ἔργῳ δὲ presente in questo passo, enfatizza il contrasto tra intenzioni e fatti; cf. *ad loc.* Rich 1990; Noè 1994 e Bellissime, Hurlet 2018.

augustea (53.16.1) e, ancor prima, della supremazia di Cesare.⁷¹

L'applicazione del filtro della *civilitas* al governo di Pertinace induce a ritenere che Cassio Dione abbia impiegato tale modulo interpretativo in maniera autonoma. Non è casuale che le tematiche chiave per la comprensione della *civilitas* dionea incrociano aspetti caratterizzanti le dinamiche di potere contemporanee all'autore, quali le stravaganze del culto imperiale, l'aumento dei processi *de maiestate*, la qualità degli onori attribuiti dal senato o avvocati per sé dai *principes*, la gestione delle risorse economiche dell'impero, il rapporto con gli apparati militari.⁷² Si tratta di argomenti giocoforza intersecati dalle tematiche toccate nei contesti in cui opera la nozione di *civilitas*: per esempio, il divieto tiberiano di prestare giuramento sugli *acta* imperiali metteva al riparo i senatori da accuse di spergiuro e di *impietas* (così come l'atteggiamento di apertura di Vespasiano nei confronti della *παρησία*);⁷³ nella medesima direzione va la riluttanza a promuovere il culto imperiale.⁷⁴ La comminazione di condanne capitali contro membri della *nobilitas* si connette poi con l'ambito economico: l'accusa di avidità contro gli imperatori è sistematicamente correlata alla condanna a morte di personaggi abbienti, strumentale all'acquisizione del loro patrimonio, spesso dissipato – al dire dello storico – turpemente.⁷⁵

In ultima analisi, dal momento che tanto nei 'libri contemporanei', quanto nei libri precedenti si rintraccia un andamento tematico (prevalentemente in sezioni circoscrivibili, come quelle introduttive)⁷⁶ centrato sulla qualità dei rapporti tra *nobilitas* tradizionale e imperatore di cui si è qui fornito solo qualche esempio, si potrebbe affermare che il punto di vista dioneo abbia condizionato la selezione degli aspetti che definiscono la sua concezione di *civilitas* e, di conseguenza, anche l'articolazione della narrazione. Per tale ragione, la *civilitas* può essere intesa come un criterio che guida l'esplorazione e la valutazione delle relazioni dialettiche tra *élite* politica tradizionale, con in testa i senatori, e *principes*. Nei libri imperiali della *Storia Romana*, il *princeps* emerge dunque sulla scena politica plasmando l'opera, dal momento che, come riconosce l'autore (53.19.1) la narrazione storica è condizionata dai mutamenti della forma di governo. Vi

⁷¹ Vd. Cass. Dio 42.49.4-5, dove Cassio Dione riferirebbe il pensiero di Cesare a proposito dei fondamenti della *δυναστεία*, individuati, appunto, nella disponibilità di denaro e nel controllo degli eserciti, aspetti tra loro interrelati.

⁷² Per un quadro d'insieme su questo periodo vd. gli studi citati *supra*, nota 13. A questo aspetto è dedicato un capitolo della ricerca dottorale (*supra*, nota 61).

⁷³ Giustamente classificato da Mallan 2016 come uno dei tratti distintivi della *civilitas principis*.

⁷⁴ Cf. l'osservazione di Plin. *pan.* 11.1: *dicavit coelo Tiberius Augustum, sed ut maiestatis crimen induceret*.

⁷⁵ E.g. 59.4-5; 18.5; 63.11.2-3; 67.4-5; 73(72). 4-7.3; 14.1; 78(77).9.1; 10; 18.1.

⁷⁶ Vd. Bono 2018, 95 ss.

sono, quindi, elementi ricorsivi e peculiari che determinano la valutazione dionea di un principato, sviluppata secondo una prospettiva coerentemente incentrata sul rapporto di compromesso tra il potere 'monarchico' del *princeps*, di cui si riconosce la necessità,⁷⁷ e i privilegi dell'aristocrazia senatoria.

5 Osservazioni conclusive

Cassio Dione concepisce il principato come un sistema di governo non monolitico, ma suscettibile di evoluzione nei rapporti di forza tra le sue componenti politico-istituzionali.⁷⁸ Sul piano teorico, la nozione dionea di *civilitas*, che traduce le istanze di partecipazione dell'aristocrazia tradizionale al governo dell'impero, è pertanto deputata a ricalibrare, riequilibrandoli, i rapporti di forza tra gli attori politici in gioco: in questo senso essa incarna la tradizione della *libertas* repubblicana pure riadattata nell'ottica senatoria di Cassio Dione alle condizioni della politica imperiale; essa è, da ultimo, preservata attraverso la μίξις costituzionale tra μοναρχία e δημοκρατία. Stando ai risultati dell'analisi lessicale qui proposta sulla concezione dionea della πολιτεία imperiale, se sul piano dei modelli politici la mescolanza tra δημοκρατία e μοναρχία corrisponde a una forma di governo misto, sul piano pratico essa si concretizza nel rispetto di talune prassi di governo radicate nelle gerarchie di potere già tipiche dell'età repubblicana, ovvero nella partecipazione dell'aristocrazia al governo della *res publica* ora in collaborazione con il *princeps* a garanzia di equilibrio, stabilità politica e legalità istituzionale. Potremmo di conseguenza affermare che vi è corrispondenza tra costituzione mista e principato civile qualora inteso come una forma di μοναρχία (= *principatus*) δημοκρατική (= *civilis*). In questo senso il modello di principato *civilis* si ispira veramente alla teoria della costituzione mista, ed è quindi sulla base di tale interpretazione che dovrebbe essere esplorato anche il significato degli aggettivi δημοκρατικός e δημοτικός, lemmi che assumono sfumature di significato peculiari nel racconto delle fasi della storia romana in cui, verificatasi una μεταβολή 'costituzionale', emergono nuove forme di gestione della *res publica*, il cui funzionamento risulta compromesso: mi riferisco, in particolare, al periodo della δυναστεία⁷⁹ e del principato.

⁷⁷ Basti ricordare l'elogio della monarchia: Cass. Dio 44.1-2.

⁷⁸ In questo senso, i capitoli 12.2-19.5 e 21.6-7 del libro 53 possono essere considerati un'esposizione ragionata del meccanismo di funzionamento del principato come sistema di governo in evoluzione, in cui l'imperatore, quale vertice della *res publica* imperiale, occupa il centro della scena.

⁷⁹ Cf. Lange 2019, 254 sulle relazioni di potere di età triumvirale; queste «are related to the balance of power between the dynasts and unrelated to personal sentiments

Se valutata in questi termini, la concezione dionea di *civilitas* non può più essere considerata una semplice virtù canonizzata e diffusa dalla propaganda imperiale, come voleva Scivoletto:⁸⁰ piuttosto, tale nozione diviene metro di valutazione della capacità dell'imperatore di realizzare una politica improntata alla tradizione della *libertas* repubblicana, intesa come garanzia di partecipazione politica e privilegi assicurati dall'imperatore all'aristocrazia.

La *civilitas*, strettamente correlata all'interpretazione dionea del principato come sistema di governo misto, rappresenta dunque il criterio di valutazione che orienta il giudizio di Cassio Dione durante un'età di rotture e trasformazioni nella gestione della politica imperiale, qual è l'età dello storico bitinico. Difatti, proprio il contesto storico-politico in cui l'autore vive e opera in qualità di storico e di senatore invita a indagare le relazioni tra *principes* e membri dell'aristocrazia tradizionale cui il concetto di *civilitas* fa riferimento. In questo senso, significativo è l'uso dioneo del verbo καταπίπτω in 72(71).36.4, impiegato per denunciare l'inizio di una fase di decadenza dopo la morte di Marco Aurelio; tale percezione continua a essere avvertita pure tra le personalità più rilevanti dell'età contemporanea a Cassio Dione:⁸¹ essa è espressa compiutamente da Severo Alessandro, che in un editto sulla remissione dell'*aurum coronarium* emesso all'inizio del principato affermava la necessità di τὸ κλῖνον ἀναλήμψασθαι [in *P. Fayum* 20 col. II, l. 14].⁸² Alla luce di tali riflessioni, credo che proprio il fallimento della politica filosenatoria promossa da Pertinace (il solo, tra i *principes* contemporanei, a cui Cassio Dione ascrive la *civilitas*!) e il cambio di passo di Settimio Severo dopo l'iniziale impegno profuso nell'*ultio* di Pertinace (accantonata a favore della riabilitazione di Commodo, 195 d.C.)⁸³ e, in definitiva, dopo la battaglia di *Lugdunum* (197 d.C.), possano aver indotto Cas-

concerning that which is or is not 'republican'. Tale osservazione si coniuga bene con la periodizzazione della *civilitas* riscontrabile in Cassio Dione: mai attribuita ai protagonisti delle guerre civili tardorepubblicane (a Pompeo è ascritta in riferimento al congedo delle truppe a Brindisi al ritorno dall'Oriente: 37.23.3; fa eccezione Catone Uticense in 43.11.6, difficilmente classificabile tra i δυνάσται!), proprio perché mai sospinti da 'sentimenti repubblicani'.

⁸⁰ Scivoletto 1970, 27-8 nota 28.

⁸¹ Sulla percezione della crisi in età contemporanea ancora pregnante Alföldy 1974. Sul passo dioneo vd. Bertrand 2015.

⁸² Sebbene le parole del *princeps* qui ricordate si riferiscano specificatamente allo stato declinante delle finanze imperiali, il tono (quasi 'autoassolutorio') dell'editto restituisce l'impressione di una condizione di crisi diffusa. Vd. recentemente Motta 2017, ove precedente bibliografia.

⁸³ In connessione con «l'autoadozione di Severo nella famiglia degli Antonini, con la conseguente riabilitazione dell'odiatissimo Commodo e l'innescare inevitabile della guerra civile con Albino»: così Letta 2019, 166.

sio Dione a riflettere⁸⁴ sul principato come forma di governo e sulla necessità di una riforma ordinata della *res publica* imperiale: da ultimo, di una πολιτική κατάσταση⁸⁵ in senso *civilis*.

Per ritornare al libro 80, e concludere, il ritratto opaco di Severo Alessandro sembra intenzionale, come già avvertiva Emilio Gabba.⁸⁶ L'immagine sfuggente di *princeps* e senato nell'ultimo libro dell'opera sembra dare conto dell'indebolimento della loro *auctoritas* e, insieme, dell'inadeguata gestione dei *milites*,⁸⁷ la cui ingerenza nelle dinamiche di potere dell'età contemporanea si riflette, come a denunciarne lo strapotere, anche a livello compositivo. Risulta conseguente, allora, il disincanto che si avverte nel finale della *Storia Romana*, esito dell'esperienza dei vani sforzi compiuti da Severo Alessandro nella promozione di un governo di cooperazione con il senato, su cui il giudizio è intenzionalmente lasciato in sospeso da Cassio Dione.

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⁸⁴ Per la datazione dell'opera seguo Schettino 2001, 555-8.

⁸⁵ Fallita da Pertinace: 74(73).10.3. Sull'uso (platonico) del sostantivo κατάσταση in Cassio Dione, Schettino 2020. Cf. anche Pistellato in questo volume.

⁸⁶ Gabba 1955, 300.

⁸⁷ Anche Erodiano ritiene fallimentare la politica di Severo Alessandro sotto questo profilo: Roberto 2017.

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Cassius Dio and the Principate

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Cassius Dio's Ideal Government and the Imperial Senate

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Abstract This chapter argues that Dio envisioned a surprisingly minimalist role for the Senate in his ideal government: magistrates and advisors were drawn from the senators, but the emperor should hold absolute power and the Senate should not constitute an important forum of genuine deliberation or advice. Instead, in Dio's ideal government, the *consilium* was the key forum of debate informing imperial policy. Dio's ideal government, and the place of the Senate therein, is distinctive as it broke with a long tradition of senatorial writing which idealised a system of government where the Senate played a central role. This nuances the widespread view of Dio as a 'senatorial historian'.

Keywords Cassius Dio. Augustus. Senate. Ideal Government. Consilium.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Maecenas' Speech. – 3 The Imperial Senate. – 4 Conclusion.





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1 Introduction

The study of Cassius Dio has undergone a transformation in recent years as the historian is no longer seen as a simple copyist but rather as a complex writer with sophisticated interpretations of Rome's political history.¹ In this transformation, Dio's ideal government has received ample attention and it has been shown that Dio viewed the Roman Republic as a fundamentally unworkable form of government and monarchy as the only viable solution.² Some studies have focused on the imperial Senate in Dio, but more work remains to be done on the exact role of this institution in Dio's ideal government and its preferable relationship with good emperors: Dio naturally wanted the senators to occupy senior magistracies but it is often argued that Dio also viewed the Senate as the key forum of debate and advice which should inform the emperor's decisions.³ It has even been suggested that, in Dio's view, the emperor and Senate should share power and the rule of Rome.⁴ This supposedly prominent role for the Senate in Dio's ideal government is part of a widespread conception of Dio as a "senatorial historian".⁵ However, there is a fundamental difference between viewing the Senate as a passive pool of administrative experts, a forum of debate or advice, and an actual governmental partner meant to share responsibilities or even power with the emperor. Attaining a more precise understanding of Dio's view of the Senate would illuminate Dio's ideal government further, as well as the effects of the Severan Age on the elite's perception of this institution.

In this chapter, I will therefore examine the Senate's role in Dio's ideal imperial government. Maecenas underlines that the senators should be given important magistracies and that the emperor should show respect to the Senate, by for example enacting laws through

¹ Older research: see especially Schwartz 1899; Millar 1964. Newer research: see especially Kemezis 2014; Fromentin et al. 2016; Lange, Madsen 2016; Burden-Strevens, Lindholmer 2019; 2020. See also Fechner 1986; Hose 1994; Kuhn-Chen 2002.

² As argued e.g. in Coudry 2016; Madsen 2016; Lindholmer 2018a; 2018b; 2019c; Burden-Strevens 2020; Madsen 2020.

³ Coltelloni-Trannoy 2016 gives a good overview of the imperial Senate's different responsibilities on the basis of Dio, but she does not explore the Senate's role in Dio's ideal government. On the other hand, Madsen 2016; 2019, 115-20; 2020, 25-56, 87-92 argues that "good government was in Dio's eyes a form of rule where the emperor was keen to allow the Senate a role by asking them for advice" (2020, 51) and aimed "to include the Senate in the decision-making process" (2020, 88).

⁴ Reinhold, Swan 1990, 166 claims that "Dio found in Augustus an exemplar who adhered to the principle of shared power between princeps and senate, as respected partners in governance". Likewise, Platon 2016, 675 argues that Dio's governmental ideal included an "exercice collegial des responsabilités politiques" by emperor and Senate.

⁵ See the works mentioned in the two preceding footnotes as well as e.g. Gleason 2010, 11; Mallan 2016, 272.

this institution. However, he also underlines that the emperor should hold undivided power and should determine imperial policy in consultation with a small group of advisors, rather than the Senate.⁶ Augustus follows Maecenas' advice: as this chapter will show, he relies on advisors rather than the Senate and only pretends to consult the senators as a whole when this facilitates the implementation of his own measures. Tiberius likewise deliberates with handpicked advisors rather than the Senate, and this example is consistently followed by those successors who are positively presented by Dio. The senators' incessant competition had been a key problem during the Republic and I will argue that, under both Augustus and Tiberius, the senators continued their problematic behaviour. This justifies the rejection of the Senate as a forum for genuine debate. Dio surely envisioned that the handpicked advisors should be of senatorial rank and he underlines the importance of respect for the senators. However, Dio still idealises a surprisingly minimalist role for the Senate: its members function as a pool from which magistrates and advisors should be drawn, but the emperor should hold absolute power and the Senate as an institution should not constitute an important forum of genuine deliberation. Instead, in Dio's ideal government, the *consilium* was the key forum of debate informing imperial policy. Pliny, Tacitus, Suetonius and other senatorial writers had long idealised a system of government where the Senate played a central role as advisory board and governmental partner. Dio's ideal government, and the place of the Senate therein, is therefore strikingly distinctive and deviated from a long tradition of senatorial writing.

2 Maecenas' Speech

After narrating Augustus' victory at Actium and its aftermath, Dio inserted a debate between Agrippa and Maecenas on the advantages and disadvantages of δημοκρατία, Dio's word for the Roman Republic, and monarchy.⁷ Maecenas' speech is often seen as an expression of Dio's own views on imperial politics.⁸ Consequently, it is noteworthy that Maecenas encourages Augustus to hold absolute power and institute what was essentially a monarchy: for example, Augustus

⁶ There is a long tradition in antiquity stipulating that a good ruler should surround himself with suitable advisors: e.g. Isocr. *ad Nic.* 6; Her. 1.4.3-6, 6.1.2; *Hist. Aug. Alex. Sev.* 16.

⁷ On Dio's use of δημοκρατία and other governmental terminology, see Freyburger-Galland 1997. The use of δημοκρατία to refer to the Roman Republic was common in Greek authors: see e.g. Plut. *Pub.* 10.5; *Ti. Gracch.* 5.3.

⁸ The debate between Agrippa and Maecenas is one of the most studied parts of Dio's work. See e.g. Ruiz 1982; Adler 2012; Burden-Strevens 2020.

should use the title “imperator” “so that you will enjoy fully the reality of the kingship (πᾶν τὸ τῆς βασιλείας ἔργον) without the odium which attaches to the name of ‘king’”.⁹ Furthermore, Dio’s Maecenas encourages Augustus to deprive the praetors and consuls of real power: he should “not maintain the traditional powers of these offices (τὰς δυνάμεις σφῶν τὰς ἀρχαίας τηρήσης), either, so that the same things do not happen again (ἵνα μὴ τὰ αὐτὰ αὖθις γένηται), but preserve the honour attaching to them”.¹⁰ “The same things happening again” (τὰ αὐτὰ αὖθις γένηται) is almost certainly a reference to the Republic’s dynasts and their struggles for ultimate power, which led to civil war.¹¹ Thus, partially to avoid civil war, Dio underlines that the Principate ought to be a system of government in which the emperor is in full control and does not share power.¹² This is unsurprising since Dio frequently comments on the impossibility, due to human nature, of genuine, stable power-sharing in a government.¹³

This of course did not preclude collaborating with other bodies in order to inform imperial policy and ensure the smooth governing of the Empire. However, it is striking that Maecenas suggests that the Senate should be accorded a limited role in governing: the Senate should be shown respect and be accorded important administrative functions such as the handling of certain trials. Furthermore, the senators should occupy the key magistracies. However, Maecenas does not advise Augustus to use the Senate as a forum of debate or consult it on important matters. Rather, handpicked advisors were key and should be consulted by the emperor on all weighty matters. This importance of advisors is emphasised already in the first surviving chapter of Maecenas’ speech where he asserts that Augustus should “place the management of public affairs in the hands of yourself and the other best citizens, to the end that the business of deliberation may be performed by the most prudent and that of ruling by those best fitted for command (τὴν διοίκησιν τῶν κοινῶν ἑαυτῷ τε καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις τοῖς ἀρίστοις προσθεῖναι, ἵνα βουλευώσιν μὲν οἱ φρονιμώτατοι, ἄρχωσι δὲ οἱ στρατηγικώτατοι)”.¹⁴ Dio is expressing himself clearly here and idealises a system in which the emperor

⁹ Cass. Dio 52.40.2. Translations of Dio are based on Cary 1914-1927, with some adjustments, and I have likewise used the Loeb Classical Library for other quoted authors.

¹⁰ Cass. Dio 52.20.3.

¹¹ On Dio’s Late Republic, see e.g. Coudry 2016; Lindholmer 2019c; Burden-Strevels 2020.

¹² Perhaps the only important area in which the Senate should be allowed to function without significant intervention from the emperor is the trials of senators and their family members: Cass. Dio 52.4.4.

¹³ See e.g. Cass. Dio F. 5.12, F. 6.3 F. 7.3. See also Lindholmer 2018a, 581-2; 2019a, 193. On human nature in Dio, see Rees 2011.

¹⁴ Cass. Dio 52.14.3.

or ruled with the help of select advisors who could inform his decisions about imperial policy.

The suggestion that Augustus should consult οἱ ἄριστοι is a consistent theme of Maecenas' speech and is elaborated upon further in the second surviving chapter from Maecenas' speech. According to Maecenas, the following course would be highly beneficial for both Augustus and the city:

τό τε πάντα τὰ προσήκοντα αὐτόν σε μετὰ τῶν ἀρίστων ἀνδρῶν νομοθετεῖν, μηδενὸς τῶν πολλῶν μήτ' ἀντιλέγοντος αὐτοῖς μήτ' ἐναντιουμένου, καὶ τὸ τοὺς πολέμους πρὸς τὰ ὑμέτερα βουλήματα διοικεῖσθαι, πάντων αὐτίκα τῶν ἄλλων τὸ κελευόμενον ποιούντων, τό τε τὰς τῶν ἀρχόντων αἰρέσεις ἐφ' ὑμῖν εἶναι, καὶ τὸ τὰς τιμὰς τὰς τε τιμωρίας ὑμᾶς ὀρίζειν.

You should yourself, in consultation with the best men, enact all the appropriate laws, without the possibility of any opposition or remonstrance to these laws on the part of any one from the masses; you and your counsellors should conduct the wars according to your own designs, all others rendering instant obedience to your commands; the choice of the officials should rest with you and your advisers; and you and they should also determine the honours and the punishments.¹⁵

The enactment of laws, the command of wars, the filling of magistracies and the giving of honours and punishments – the areas mentioned by Dio here are essentially the core of imperial government. It is therefore all the more striking that the Senate as an institution is given no advisory role here. Rather, Dio again makes clear that the emperor should be in unquestioned control and it is the best men, οἱ ἄριστοι, who should advise and counsel Augustus in these central areas. All others should simply obey commands.

One could object that οἱ ἄριστοι refers to the Senate and Augustus in his speech in Book 53 does assert that “it is to you senators, to you who are the best and wisest, that I restore the entire administration of the state” (ὁμῖν γάρ, ὁμῖν τοῖς ἀρίστοις καὶ φρονιμωτάτοις πάντα τὰ κοινὰ ἀνατίθημι).¹⁶ However, this functions as a form of occasion-based flattery of the senators and it is worth noting that the speech is fundamentally mendacious: Augustus' offer to lay down power is a duplicitous attempt to “have his sovereignty voluntarily confirmed by the people, so as to avoid the appearance of having

¹⁵ Cass. Dio 52.15.1-2.

¹⁶ Cass. Dio 53.8.5.

forced them against their will".¹⁷ More importantly, nowhere else is the senators collectively described as οἱ ἄριστοι. In fact, Dio consistently uses this as a moral designation of the noblest or most excellent men of the state, rather than as a reference to the Senate as a whole or a senatorial elite.¹⁸ In Dio's narrative of the Republic, the Senate was certainly not made up exclusively of the best men. Rather, they were engaged in constant political competition to the point that "no man of that day took part in public life from pure motives and free from any desire of personal gain except Cato".¹⁹ Indeed, I have argued elsewhere that even the normally idealised earlier Republic in Dio was plagued by this competition and that it was this factor (rather than a few ambitious individuals, as in the parallel sources) which ultimately became key to the fall of Dio's Republic.²⁰ Consequently, when Maecenas immediately after the Republican narrative argues that Augustus should be advised by the ἄριστοι, it is highly unlikely that he is referring to the Senate as a whole.

This is further supported when Maecenas points to the benefit of the proposed course:

οὕτω γὰρ ἂν μάλιστα τά τε πραττόμενα ὀρθῶς διοικηθεῖν, μήτε ἐς τὸ κοινὸν ἀναφερόμενα μήτε ἐν τῷ φανερῷ βουλευόμενα μήτε τοῖς παρακελευστοῖς ἐπιτερόμενα μήτε ἐκ φιλοτιμίας κινδυνευόμενα.

Thus whatever business was done would be most likely to be managed in the right way, instead of being referred to the popular assembly, or deliberated upon openly, or entrusted to partisan delegates, or exposed to the danger of ambitious rivalry.²¹

If οἱ ἄριστοι meant the Senate in Maecenas' speech, all the important areas outlined above were to be debated openly in the Senate, but Maecenas is exactly underlining here that avoiding this is one of the chief advantages of his proposal. Furthermore, Augustus purges the Senate numerous times and the senators act problematically time and time again, as explored below, which contrasts with a supposed description of them as the "best men".²² Rather, it appears that Maecenas is suggesting that Augustus should rule with a small group of select advisors who should be the best men of the empire.

¹⁷ Cass. Dio 53.2.7. On this speech, see now Burden-Strevens 2020, 108-11, 177-81.

¹⁸ See e.g. Cass. Dio F. 21.1; 53.8.6; 69.18.1.

¹⁹ Cass. Dio 37.57.3.

²⁰ Lindholmer 2018a; 2018b; 2019a; 2019b; 2019c; 2020. See also Coudry 2016; Burden-Strevens 2020; Madsen 2020, 29-36, 67-82.

²¹ Cass. Dio 52.15.4.

²² Purging the Senate: see e.g. Cass. Dio 54.13.1, 54.14.3.

In fact, this is exactly how the emperors of the Principate had generally ruled: the emperor took important decisions with the advice of his *consilium*, a small group of advisors. Initially, Augustus had a *consilium* made up of consuls and other elected officials as well as fifteen senators chosen by lot.²³ However, as Augustus aged, the election by lot was removed, family members were introduced to the *consilium* and Augustus could include whoever he wished.²⁴ Essentially, according to Crook's seminal work, the *consilium* during the Principate in general was "in every case *ad hoc*; there is no recognized constitutional body in question and no fixed list of members".²⁵ Instead, the emperor handpicked advisors depending on the situation and hereby ensured that he, ideally, was advised by the most suitable men. It seems highly likely that Dio is referring to this imperial tradition, especially since he had been a part of the *consilium* himself.²⁶ Thus, Dio is essentially suggesting that emperors should pick οἱ ἄριστοι for the *consilium* and consult this group about imperial policy. Many of the ἄριστοι would of course be senators but there is a fundamental difference between informing imperial policy by debate in the *consilium* and the Senate.

When discussing the merits of monarchy compared to δημοκρατία, Dio comments: "for it is easier to find a single excellent man than many of them, and if even this seems to some a difficult feat, it is quite inevitable that the other alternative should be acknowledged to be impossible; for it does not belong to the majority of men to acquire virtue (οὐ γὰρ προσήκει τοῖς πολλοῖς ἀρετὴν κτᾶσθαι)".²⁷ His republican narrative had exemplified that this problem certainly also applied to the senatorial elite. That the problems of destructive senatorial competition would not vanish with the introduction of monarchy is made clear by Maecenas' suggestion regarding the appointment of praetors and consuls. These offices "are the only ones at

²³ Cass. Dio 53.21.4.

²⁴ Cass. Dio 56.28.2-3.

²⁵ Crook 1955, 26. See also 29-30.

²⁶ This is e.g. clear from Cass. Dio 77[76].17.1 which praises Septimius Severus' handling of judicial matters since "he allowed the litigants plenty of time and he gave us, his advisers, full liberty to speak" (καὶ γὰρ τοῖς δικαζομένοις ὕδωρ ἱκανὸν ἐνέχει, καὶ ἡμῖν τοῖς συνδικάζουσιν αὐτῷ παρησίαν πολλὴν ἐδίδου). In an attempt to reject Dio's participation in the *consilium*, Letta 1979, 122-3; 2019, 165-6 argues that the passage refers to senatorial trials since senators were often tried in the Senate. In that case, Dio's first person plural would refer to the senators, not the participants in the *consilium*. However, 77[76].17.1 describes Severus' judicial activity in general, rather than specifically focusing on senatorial trials, and the passage therefore strongly suggests that Dio was part of the *consilium*. This is likewise supported by Cass. Dio 76[75].16.4, 78[77].17.3. Barnes 1984, 243 fn. 17 deems Letta's objections to Dio's participation in the *consilium* "implausible".

²⁷ Cass. Dio 44.2.1-2.

home which you ought to fill by election, and these merely out of regard for the institutions of our fathers and to avoid the appearance (δοκεῖν) of making a complete change in the constitution. But make all the appointments yourself and do not any longer commit the filling of one or another of these offices [...] to the Senate, for the senators will employ corruption in the elections (μήτε ἐπὶ τῷ συνεδρίῳ, διασπουδάσσονται γάρ).²⁸ Electoral competition had been a key problem in the Republic and Maecenas underlines that this element should be rooted out in the Empire. Thus, the senators in general have not been transformed by the introduction of monarchy and they are instead portrayed highly negatively here. This supports Maecenas' suggestion that the *consilium* rather than the Senate should be the key forum of debate.

This is of course not to suggest that Maecenas completely rejects the importance of the Senate or republican traditions. Indeed, in the passage just quoted, although Augustus was supposed to appoint the magistrates in reality, there should be *pro forma* elections, which underlines the importance of respect for Rome's republican traditions. Furthermore, Maecenas suggests that embassies should be introduced before the Senate: "it is both awe-inspiring and calculated to arouse comment for the impression to prevail that the Senate has full authority in all matters (τό τε τὴν βουλὴν πάντων κυρίαν δοκεῖν εἶναι)".²⁹ Dio underlines that the Senate's authority is an illusion, but this illusion plays an important role as it awes the embassies. The same emphasis on the importance of respecting the Senate, without according it actual power, is seemingly evident when Maecenas argues that "you would do well to have all your legislation enacted by the Senate, and to enforce no measure whatever upon all the people alike except the decrees of this body".³⁰ This would naturally involve some deliberation in the Senate but, importantly, such deliberation is not presented as significant by Maecenas. Rather, enacting laws through the Senate would increase "the dignity of the empire" (τό τε ἀξίωμα τὸ τῆς ἀρχῆς) and free the laws from "all dispute or uncertainty in the eyes of all the people".³¹ Thus, the enactment of legislation by the Senate was beneficial not because of

²⁸ Cass. Dio 52.20.2-3. Dio only uses this word three times and one of them refers to electoral corruption: 36.38.1-3. The word can also mean "behave zealously" (F. 65.1) but this would likely still be a reference to the negative political competition of the Republic. On this passage, see also Madsen 2020, 42.

²⁹ Cass. Dio 52.31.1.

³⁰ Cass. Dio 52.31.2. This suggestion can be seen as an exhortation to the Severan emperors to allot the Senate a bigger role in legislation, more akin to that enjoyed in the reign of Augustus: Brunt 1984, 426; Reinhold 1988, 204. On senatorial legislation, see Talbert 1984, 431-59.

³¹ Cass. Dio 52.31.2.

the accompanying senatorial debate but because its republican ancestry lent dignity and authority to the Empire and the emperor's laws. Lastly, Dio's Maecenas may have advised emperors to respect the Senate since this would encourage the emperor to be a *primus inter pares* rather than a tyrant.³²

Maecenas also underlines that the senators should be used to govern provinces and should generally occupy important magistracies.³³ Furthermore, the senators should conduct festivals and serve as judges.³⁴ They were thus an essential pool from which the emperor could draw for the imperial administration. However, Maecenas' speech still presents a surprisingly minimalist role for the Senate: Dio leaves no doubt that the emperor was and should be in complete control with no real power devolved to the Senate. Most strikingly, Dio in Maecenas' speech does not envision the Senate as an important deliberative organ which should influence imperial policy through genuine debate. Instead, he suggests that the emperor should make his decisions in consultation with the *consilium*. Against the background of especially Dio's highly negative portrayal of the republican senators, this suggestion appears logical. However, the Senate still had an important role as it provided the new, and in Dio's view necessary, monarchical government with authority and prestige.

3 The Imperial Senate

Let us now turn our attention to the imperial Senate to see how this institution functioned and was included under different emperors. Once the surviving part of Dio's original narrative ends in Claudius' reign and we have to rely mainly on Xiphilinus' epitome, it becomes more difficult to analyse the Senate's role in government since Xiphilinus generally focuses on the emperor rather than the Senate.³⁵ Partly for this reason, I will mainly focus on Augustus but also because his rule is narrated in comparatively rich detail and he is arguably Dio's ideal emperor.³⁶ His general approach to ruling and his handling of the Senate can therefore reasonably be viewed as an ideal to be followed in Dio's eyes.

³² In fact, the theme of tyranny is mentioned repeatedly in the Agrippa-Maecenas debate: e.g. 52.9; 52.15.1.

³³ Cass. Dio 52.22-23.

³⁴ Cass. Dio 52.20.5.

³⁵ On Xiphilinus' epitome of Dio, see Mallan 2013; Berbessou-Broustet 2016.

³⁶ According to Rich 1989, 101-102, Dio's Augustus was "a model emperor both at home and abroad". Likewise Giua 1983. On Dio's Augustus, see also Millar 1964, 83-102; Manuwald 1979; Reinhold, Swan 1990; Burden-Strevens 2020.

Dio's handling of the imperial narrative generally reinforces the impression that emperors should rule in consultation with advisors rather than the Senate. For example, as pointed out recently, Dio rarely describes senatorial debates and mainly focuses on this body when it interacts with the emperor. This contrasts with Tacitus who, although he underlines the specious liberty of the Principate, frequently includes senatorial debates.³⁷ Dio's preference for advisors may be supported by a noteworthy characteristic of Dio's imperial speeches: in the republican narrative, numerous speeches exemplifying senatorial debate are included, but this ceases with the Empire.³⁸ Instead there are deliberative speeches from advisors, in the shape of the long Agrippa-Maecenas debate and Livia's advice to Augustus about clemency, and speeches in which the emperor communicates to the Senate, namely Augustus' diatribe against the childless and Tiberius' funeral speech.³⁹ Thus, through his speeches, Dio presents especially his idealised Augustus as ruling in cooperation with advisors and merely communicating important matters to the Senate, while the lack of senatorial speeches gives the impression of a passive Senate that is not a key deliberative forum for the emperor.⁴⁰ This mirrors Maecenas' suggestion but contrasts with Tacitus who includes several speeches by senators.⁴¹

If we look at the details of Dio's Augustan narrative, it also follows Maecenas' suggestions closely. In the first Augustan book, Dio claims that Augustus "encouraged everybody to give him advice"⁴² but then adds:

τὸ δὲ δὴ πλεῖστον τοὺς τε ὑπάτους [...] καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀρχόντων
ἓνα παρ' ἑκάστων, ἕκ τε τοῦ λοιποῦ τῶν βουλευτῶν πλήθους
πεντεκαίδεκα τοὺς κλήρω1 λαχόντας, συμβούλους ἐς ἑξάμηνον
παρελάμβανεν, ὥστε δι' αὐτῶν καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις πᾶσι κοινοῦσθαι
τρόπον τινὰ τὰ νομοθετούμενα νομίζεσθαι. ἐσέφερε μὲν γάρ τινα

³⁷ See e.g. Tac. *Ann.* 1.77, 1.79, 2.33.

³⁸ See e.g. Cass. Dio 36.25-35; 45.18-47; 46.1-28.

³⁹ Cass. Dio 55.14-21; 56.2-9, 56.35-41. Note also the famous passage (Cass. Dio 53.19) where Dio asserts that public debate changed with the advent of monarchy and that information from then on was kept secret in contrast to the Republic. In relation to the speeches, it is worth noting that the Agrippa-Maecenas debate, strictly speaking, is not addressed to an emperor, but rather to a victorious late republican dynast. However, it may still exemplify the future ruler's ability to engage in genuine debate with his advisors. To this list of speeches could be added Augustus' *recusatio imperii* in Book 53, although this too is a speech by a dynast rather than an emperor as such. On the endpoint of Dio's Republic, see Urso in this volume. On Dio's speeches, see recently Burden-Strevens 2020.

⁴⁰ As pointed out by Platon 2016, 658.

⁴¹ See e.g. Tac. *Ann.* 3.50; 4.34-35.

⁴² Cass Dio 53.21.3.

καὶ ἐς πᾶσαν τὴν γερουσίαν, βέλτιον μέντοι νομίζων εἶναι τὸ μετ' ὀλίγων καθ' ἡσυχίαν τὰ τε πλείω καὶ τὰ μείζω προσκοπεῖσθαι [...]. οὐ μέντοι καὶ ἐπράττετο τι ὃ μὴ καὶ ἐκείνον ἥρεσκε.

Most important of all, he took as advisers for periods of six months the consuls [...], one of each of the other kinds of officials, and fifteen men chosen by lot from the remainder of the senatorial body, with the result that all legislation proposed by the emperor is usually communicated after a fashion through this body to all the other senators; for although he brought certain matters before the whole senate, yet he generally followed this plan, considering it better to take under preliminary advisement most matters and the most important ones in consultation with a few; [...] nothing was done that did not please Caesar.⁴³

Firstly, the final sentence highlights that power rested solely in the hands of Augustus.⁴⁴ More importantly, Dio explicitly presents the decisions as taken in deliberation with advisors, and through προσκοπεῖσθαι he indicates that this involved genuine discussions. By contrast, it is difficult to read δι' αὐτῶν κοινοῦσθαι as anything but a simple, though respectful, communication of the decisions taken by Augustus in deliberation with his advisors. Thus, Augustus may have encouraged “everybody” to give advice, like an accessible *primus inter pares*, but Dio makes clear that the handpicked advisors were the backbone (τὸ πλεῖστον) of Augustus’ decision-making process. This passage makes clear that the advisors in Dio’s mind are almost exclusively senatorial, but there is a fundamental difference between encouraging the use of certain senators as advisors and using the Senate as a deliberative forum in which all senators could participate.

In Book 56, Dio’s Augustus attended Senate meetings more rarely due to his age and the chosen advisors became even more essential: “it was also voted that any measure should be valid, as being satisfactory to the whole Senate, which should be resolved upon by him [i.e. Augustus] in deliberation (βουλευομένῳ) with Tiberius and with these counsellors [...] and such others as he might at any time call on for advice. Having gained by this decree these privileges, which in reality he had possessed in any case, he continued to transact (ἐχρημάτιζεν) most of the public business”.⁴⁵ Again, Augustus is presented as transacting public business in deliberation with advisors and, importantly, all measures decided upon by Augustus and these advisors were now regarded as “satisfactory to the whole Senate”.

⁴³ Cass Dio 53.21.4-6.

⁴⁴ This is emphasised numerous times: e.g. Cass. Dio 53.17.1.

⁴⁵ Cass. Dio 56.28.2-3.

This ties in with Maecenas' emphasis on the importance of having legislation enacted by the Senate, without debating genuinely with the senators as a whole. Indeed, in the just quoted passage, the advisors have become a form of substitute for the Senate and we know from the previous passage that this reliance on advisors was not an unintended misfortune due to age. Thus, in these two passages, Dio asserts that Augustus and his advisors essentially conducted the majority of public business with no real involvement from the Senate. This is never framed negatively by Dio and Augustus' actions, which follow Maecenas' advice closely, should rather be seen as an example to be followed.

Dio also notes that Augustus used advisors when dealing with judicial matters: even in old age, he "continued personally, with his assistants (μετὰ τῶν συνέδρων), to investigate judicial cases and to pass judgment".⁴⁶ In fact, only once in Dio's narrative of Augustus' rule could this emperor appear to genuinely consult the senators: Dio writes that Augustus posted potential laws in the Senate "so that if any provision did not please them, or if they could advise anything better, they might speak. He was very desirous indeed of being democratic (οὕτω γάρ που δημοκρατικός ἡξίου εἶναι), as one or two incidents will illustrate".⁴⁷ This could appear to be genuine consultation, but it is noteworthy that Dio connects it to Augustus wishing to be seen as δημοκρατικός.⁴⁸ Earlier, Dio had remarked that the emperors clothed themselves in "democratic names" (δημοκρατικῶν ὀνομάτων)⁴⁹ by using republican titles, but underlines that they were kings nonetheless. Using a related word and imparting the same message, Dio in Book 53 asserts that Augustus wished "to be thought democratic (δημοτικός)".⁵⁰ Therefore, this emperor made a show of giving the Senate some of the provinces to govern, but he retained control of all provinces with significant armed forces and Dio underlines his duplicitousness in this situation.⁵¹ Thus, Dio's Augustus has a habit of making shows of deference to the Senate and republican traditions in order to appear δημοκρατικός/δημοτικός.⁵² This ties in with Maecenas' suggestion that laws should be enacted in the Senate in order to increase "the dignity of the empire" (τό τε ἀξίωμα τὸ τῆς ἀρχῆς), whereas the senatorial deliberation that resulted from such a course

⁴⁶ Cass. Dio 55.33.5.

⁴⁷ Cass. Dio 55.4.1-2.

⁴⁸ This, and δημοτικός, are probably a Greek gloss on *civilis*: Wallace-Hadrill 1982, 44; Freyburger-Galland 1997, 116-23. On *civilis* in Dio, see Bono 2018.

⁴⁹ Cass. Dio 53.18.2.

⁵⁰ Cass. Dio 53.12.1.

⁵¹ Cass. Dio 53.12.1-3.

⁵² On this, see also Noe and Pistellato in this volume.

is not presented as important for informing imperial policy. Augustus posting laws in the Senate should probably be seen in this context: rather than functioning as a genuine attempt to consult the senators about imperial policy, it lent dignity to the Empire and ensured that Augustus' desire to appear δημοκρατικός was fulfilled.⁵³

That this is the case is further supported by specific examples where Augustus pretends to consult the Senate only to force through his own measures. In Book 55, for instance, Augustus is in need of revenues for the military but, rather than enforcing a tax, he asks the Senate to suggest ways of procuring the funds which he would then consider.⁵⁴ Importantly, Dio underlines that "this was not because he had no plan of his own, but as the most certain means of persuading them to choose the plan he preferred. At all events, when different men had proposed different schemes, he approved none of them, but established the tax of five per cent on [...] inheritances and bequests".⁵⁵ In relation to imperial expenditures, Augustus "employed three ex-consuls, chosen by lot, by whose help he reduced some of them and altogether abolished others".⁵⁶ Augustus thus makes a show of including the Senate in the decision-making process here but this is not to receive actual advice. Instead, it eases the introduction of his own measures. On the other hand, to reduce expenditures, Augustus relied on the genuine support of hand-picked advisors.

This approach of exploiting and manipulating the Senate to strengthen Augustus' own measures is clear also in Book 56. Here Dio writes that an uprising seemed likely as a result of the new tax but rather than quelling the uprising violently, Augustus allowed the senators to suggest alternatives. The tax was changed to one on fields and houses but only with the purpose "that they should fear even greater losses and so be content to pay the five per cent tax; and this is what actually happened. Thus Augustus handled these matters".⁵⁷ Again, the Senate's proposals are not encouraged as part of actual deliberations and the Senate is rather used to implement and facilitate Augustus' own measures. In these examples, Dio makes no critical comments and we should rather see this is a model of good rulership in Dio's eyes. Furthermore, these examples illustrate that Augustus posting laws in the Senate and receiving suggestions about them should not necessarily be read as genuine deliberation. Instead, it is probably an attempt to appear δημοκρατικός.

⁵³ Madsen 2020, 87, by contrast, sees Augustus' actions as a genuine request for advice. See also Talbert 1984, 434.

⁵⁴ Cass. Dio 55.25.4-5.

⁵⁵ Cass. Dio 55.25.4.

⁵⁶ Cass. Dio 55.25.6.

⁵⁷ Cass. Dio 56.28.6.

Thus, both Maecenas' speech and the narrative of Augustus consistently present the *consilium*, rather than the Senate, as the key deliberative forum. However, a passage in Tiberius' funeral speech of Augustus could be read as contrasting with this presentation: he "always communicated to the senators (or: "consulted the senators on") all the greatest and most important matters, either in the senate chamber or else at his house" (οἷς πάντα τὰ μέγιστα καὶ ἀναγκαιότατα ἀεί ποτε ἢ ἐν τῷ συνεδρίῳ ἢ καὶ οἴκοι [...] ἐπεκοίνου).⁵⁸ The key lies in (ἐπι)κοινώω and it is worth lingering over it as Dio elsewhere also describes interaction between emperor and Senate with this word. Fundamentally, it means "to make common" (from κοινός) in the sense of sharing something, for example the responsibility for a war or news and opinions through communication. Indeed, in Dio's surviving narrative, he uses κοινώω 21 times and 9 mean "to communicate", 8 mean "to share" authority or purpose, while the exact meaning in 3 instances is unclear.⁵⁹ Importantly, κοινώω is several times used for simple communication from emperor to Senate, rather than debate or consultation.⁶⁰ Κοινώω can also mean "to consult or debate", but there is only one instance of this in Dio's surviving narrative.⁶¹ Dio's use of κοινώω is in fact quite unremarkable and is paralleled in for example Thucydides whom Dio is often thought to have imitated and who, like Dio, wrote in the Attic dialect.⁶² Thucydides uses κοινώω 6 times for communication, twice for sharing, once in an unclear manner and once for consultation.⁶³ Dio also uses κοινώω with the prefix ἐπι-, as in the just quoted passage, but this does not entail a fundamentally different meaning in Dio: ἐπικοινώω is used 7 times, aside from the above passage, but it is never clearly used for consultation and instead refers to communication three times.⁶⁴ Overall, then, (ἐπι)κοινώω is almost never used for consultation and is most often

⁵⁸ Cass. Dio 56.41.3.

⁵⁹ Communicate: Cass. Dio 38.4.1; 41.12.2; 42.20.1; 46.41.2, 52.4, 55.3; 48.12.1; 53.21.4; 55.10.8. Share: 40.59.1; 42.56.3; 47.32.1; 48.29.1; 52.4.2; 52.19.5; 55.30.2; 59.6.1. Unclear: 52.36.3; 55.10.14. Also 57.7.1 but see below. I have here only examined Dio's surviving text, not the epitomes of Zonaras and Xiphilinus.

⁶⁰ This is exemplified by the passage quoted earlier (Cass. Dio 53.21.4) where Augustus communicated all legislation to the Senate through his advisors (δι' αὐτῶν κοινοῦσθαι) or by instances where κοινώω is used for interaction between the emperor and "the Senate and people" (τῷ δήμῳ [καὶ] τῇ βουλῇ): Cass. Dio 56.55.3; 57.20.2. Obviously, this must refer to simple communication as no consultation or debate can be envisioned with the δῆμος.

⁶¹ Cass. Dio 58.28.1.

⁶² On Thucydides' influence on Dio, see e.g. Rees 2011, 62–86.

⁶³ Communicate: Thuc. 2.72.2, 73.1; 3.95.2; 5.38.2, 60.1; 8.58.3. Share: 1.39.3; 8.8.1. Unclear: 4.4.1. Potential consultation: 8.82.2.

⁶⁴ Communicate: Cass. Dio 42.27.2; 57.21.4; 58.9.2. Unclear: 43.27.1; 45.22.4; 52.21.4. Also 57.7.3 but see below. I have again only examined Dio's surviving narrative, not

used specifically for communication. Against this background, it is highly likely that Tiberius is praising Augustus for respectfully communicating to the senators, but not consulting them, regarding important matters. This also fits excellently with Dio's narrative of Augustus as a whole as well as Maecenas' speech.

Let us now turn our attention to Augustus' successors. Dio's Tiberius follows the canonical pattern of an idealised first period and a corrupted second phase. Until Germanicus' death, Dio writes, Tiberius ruled in the following way:

αὐτὸς μὲν καθ' ἑαυτὸν ἢ τι ἢ οὐδὲν ἔπραττε, πάντα δὲ δὴ καὶ τὰ σμικρότατα ἕς τε τὴν γερουσίαν ἐσέφερε καὶ ἐκείνῃ ἐκοίνου. ἐπεποιήτο μὲν γὰρ βῆμα ἐν τῇ ἀγορᾷ, ἐφ' οὗ προκαθίζων ἐχρημάτιζε, καὶ συμβούλους αἰεὶ κατὰ τὸν Αὐγούστον παρελάμβανεν, οὐ μέντοι καὶ διώκει λόγον τι ἄξιον ὃ μὴ καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ἐπεκοίνου. καὶ ἕς γε τὸ μέσον τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γνώμην τιθεὶς οὐχ ὅπως ἀντειπεῖν αὐτῇ παντὶ τῷ παρρησίαν ἔνεμεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰναντία οἱ ἔστιν ὅτε ψηφίζομένων τινῶν ἔφερε. καὶ γὰρ αὐτὸς ψήφον πολλάκις ἐδίδου. ὁ μὲν γὰρ Δροῦσος ἐξ ἴσου τοῖς ἄλλοις τοτὲ μὲν πρῶτος τοτὲ δὲ μεθ' ἑτέρους τοῦτ' ἐποίει· ἐκεῖνος δὲ ἔστι μὲν ὅτε ἐσιώπα, ἔστι δ' ὅτε καὶ πρῶτος ἢ καὶ μετ' ἄλλους τινὰς ἢ καὶ τελευταῖος τὰ μὲν ἀντικρὺς ἀπεφαίνετο, τὰ δὲ δὴ πλείω, ἴνα δὴ μὴ δοκῇ τὴν παρρησίαν αὐτῶν ἀφαιρεῖσθαι, ἔλεγεν ὅτι “εἰ γνώμην ἐποιούμην, τὰ καὶ τὰ ἀν' ἀπεδειξάμην”. καὶ ἦν μὲν καὶ τοῦτο τὴν ἴσῃν τῷ ἑτέρῳ ἰσχὺν ἔχον, οὐ μέντοι καὶ ἐκωλύοντο οἱ λοιποὶ ὑπ' αὐτοῦ τὰ δοκοῦντά σφισι λέγειν, ἀλλὰ καὶ πολλάκις ὁ μὲν τὸ ἐγίγνωσκεν, οἱ δὲ μετ' αὐτὸν ἕτερόν τι ἀνθηροῦντο, καὶ ἔστιν ὅτε καὶ ἐπεκράτουν· καὶ οὐδενὶ μὲντοι παρὰ τοῦτο ὀργὴν εἶχεν. ἐδίδκαζε μὲν οὖν ὥσπερ εἶπον, ἐπεφοίτα δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ τῶν ἀρχόντων δικαστήρια

He did little or nothing on his own responsibility, but brought all matters, even the slightest, before the senate and communicated them to that body. In the Forum a tribunal had been erected on which he sat in public to dispense justice, and he always associated with himself advisers, after the manner of Augustus, nor did he take any step of consequence without making it known to the rest. After setting forth his own opinion he not only granted everyone full liberty to speak against it, but even when, as sometimes happened, others voted in opposition to him, he submitted; for he often would cast a vote himself. Drusus used to act just like the rest, now speaking first, and again after some of the others. As for Tiberius, he would sometimes remain silent and sometimes gave his opinion first, or after a few others, or even last; in some cases he would speak his mind direct-

Zonaras and Xiphilinus. Προεπικoinώω is also used once (Cass. Dio 55.4.3) and refers to communication.

ly, but generally, in order to avoid appearing to take away their freedom of speech, he would say: 'if I had been giving my views, I should have proposed this or that'. This method was just as effective as the other and yet the rest were not thereby prevented from stating their views. On the contrary, he would frequently express one opinion and those who followed would prefer something different, and sometimes they actually prevailed; yet for all that he harboured anger against no one. So, he held court in this way, but he also attended the courts presided over by the magistrates.⁶⁵

The passage is somewhat vague, but the key is determining the identity of "the rest" (τοῖς ἄλλοις): it could refer to the rest of the senators not included in the advisory group, in which case Tiberius is deliberating with the Senate as a whole. "The rest" could also refer to Tiberius' advisory group, in which case Dio is asserting that Tiberius did nothing without consulting his advisors and then describing the process of this consultation.⁶⁶

There are several factors indicating that this describes Tiberius' interactions with his advisors, but the most compelling evidence is that "Drusus used to act just like the rest (τοῖς ἄλλοις), now speaking first, and again after some of the others".⁶⁷ There is clear evidence to show that there was an order of speaking in the Senate.⁶⁸ Drusus (and Tiberius who acted in the same way) may have had the freedom to deviate from this order, but Dio underlines that in doing so Drusus acted "just like rest (τοῖς ἄλλοις)". If τοῖς ἄλλοις refers to the senators, it entails that the order of speaking in the Senate was complete-

⁶⁵ Cass. Dio 57.7.2-6. On Dio's Tiberius, see Baar 1990; Platon 2016.

⁶⁶ The passage is often viewed as a description of Tiberius interacting with the Senate: see e.g. Swan 2004, 219 fn. 267 who asserts that the phrase "In the Forum ... manner of Augustus" is concessive and that Dio therefore is describing Tiberius' *modus operandi* in the Senate. However, he offers no arguments to support the reading of this phrase as concessive.

⁶⁷ Dio's assertion that Tiberius used advisors "after the manner of Augustus" also supports the reading of τοῖς ἄλλοις as advisors, since Augustus consistently consulted his advisors rather than the Senate. This reading is strengthened by the narrative context: Dio first describes Tiberius' interaction with the Senate and then moves on to his use of advisors in a judicial context. This is followed by the description of Tiberius' interaction with τοῖς ἄλλοις and Dio then describes Tiberius' judicial work again. It thus makes most sense to read the whole passage from "In the Forum..." as a description of Tiberius' judicial work and his use of advisors in this context. This also fits well with ἐδίκασε μὲν οὖν ὥσπερ εἶπον. Instead of being a somewhat redundant recapitulation of the fact that Tiberius sometimes dealt with judicial matters, the phrase can now be read as Dio summing up Tiberius' approach to judicial matters: "so, he held court in this way...". The mention of voting (ψηφίζομένων and ψήφον) could be seen as a reference to debate in the Senate but Dio also uses ψῆφος to describe the votes cast by Augustus and his judicial advisors: 55.3.2.

⁶⁸ See e.g. Cass. Dio 54.15.6 with Talbert 1984, 240-8.

ly abandoned under Tiberius, which appears highly unlikely. Overall, then, τοῖς ἄλλοις likely refers to Tiberius' advisors and the passage therefore probably describes his behaviour when deliberating with this group, rather than the senators as a whole.

Thus, Dio appears to be praising Tiberius for communicating matters to his advisors (τοῖς ἄλλοις ἐπεκοίνου) and then engaging in genuine discussions with them, even yielding to their arguments at times.⁶⁹ It is worth noting that Dio just before this writes that Tiberius "brought (ἐσέφερε) all matters, even the slightest, before the senate and ἐκοίνου them to that body". As argued above, κοινόω generally refers to communication rather than consultation and εἰσφέρω is consistently used for introducing proposals in the Senate for a vote.⁷⁰ Thus, Tiberius seems to be praised for following Maecenas' advice that an emperor should have legislation passed in the Senate. This would naturally involve at least a brief senatorial debate but it is noteworthy that this debate is not highlighted as important. Instead, Dio's lengthy description of how Tiberius engaged in genuine debate with his advisors underlines that it was the *consilium*, rather than the Senate, that constituted the key forum for debate informing imperial policy. This, in turn, illustrates Dio's assertion that Tiberius used advisors in the same manner as Augustus.

This presentation of Tiberius also sheds light on an important Augustan passage: at 55.34.1, there is a long lacuna and the text then starts "<...> however, declare his opinion among the first, but among the last, his purpose being that all might be permitted to form their views independently and no one should abandon his own judgment, as though he were under any necessity of agreeing with the emperor, and he would often sit with the magistrates as they tried cases" (<...> μέντοι καὶ ἐν τοῖς πρώτοις ἀλλ' ἐν τοῖς ὑστάτοις ἀπεφαινετο, ὅπως ἰδιοβουλεῖν ἅπασιν ἐξεῖη καὶ μηδεὶς αὐτῶν τῆς ἑαυτοῦ γνώμης, ὥς καὶ ἀνάγκην τινὰ συμφρονῆσαί οἱ ἔχων, ἐξίστατο τοῖς τε ἄρχουσι πολλάκις συνεδίκασε).⁷¹ This passage is generally thought to describe Augustus interacting with the Senate, mainly because Augustus' behaviour exhibits parallels with Tiberius' supposed behaviour towards the Senate in the passage above.⁷² However, if the Tiberian passage describes Tiberius' interaction with his advisors, there is no reason

⁶⁹ It is also possible that ἐπεκοίνου, in the phrase "τοῖς ἄλλοις ἐπεκοίνου", means "to consult" and that it points to the following description of Tiberius consulting his advisors.

⁷⁰ See e.g. Cass. Dio 36.42.1; 37.51.3; 55.3.6; 60.4.2.2.

⁷¹ I am currently developing this alternative reconstruction of 55.34.1 into an article: Lindholmer forthcoming.

⁷² See e.g. Swan 2004, 219 fn. 267; Madsen 2016, 146; Platon 2016, 237 fn. 535. Parallels: neither emperor declared his opinion first and both emperors were keen to encourage others to express their own opinions.

to suppose that 55.34.1 describes Augustus and the Senate. Rather, Dio highlights that Tiberius used advisors like Augustus and the parallels between Tiberius' behaviour in relation to his advisors and Augustus' behaviour in the lacunose passage suggest that this passage describes Augustus interacting with his advisors. This also fits Dio's general portrayal of Augustus. It is thus unlikely that 55.34.1 describes Augustus' interaction with the Senate. Rather, it appears to be another example of Augustus' use of advisors, and Dio underlines that this emperor deliberated with them genuinely.

Against this background, we may better understand Dio's description of Vespasian's interaction with the Senators. This emperor "regularly attended the meetings of the Senate and he communicated all matters to the senators (ἐξ τε τὸ συνέδριον διὰ παντὸς ἐφοίτα, καὶ περὶ πάντων αὐτοῖς ἐπεκοίνου)." ⁷³ There is little context to aid us here, probably due to Xiphilinus, but Dio consistently uses (ἐπι)κοινώω for simple communication between emperor and Senate, while it is very rarely used for consultation. Therefore, the most natural reading of this passage is that Vespasian, just like his predecessors Augustus and Tiberius, communicated public matters to the Senate as a sign of respect but did not consult this body.

A final important passage to be considered here is found in the narrative of Hadrian. Dio relates that Hadrian "conducted through the Senate all the important and most urgent business and he held court with the assistance of the foremost men" (Ἐπραττε δὲ καὶ διὰ τοῦ βουλευτηρίου πάντα τὰ μεγάλα καὶ ἀναγκαιότατα, καὶ ἐδίκασε μετὰ τῶν πρώτων). ⁷⁴ Maecenas above had suggested that important laws and other decrees should be decided upon by the emperor and his advisors but enacted by the Senate, and the passage may very well describe such a process of enactment *through* (διὰ) the Senate. Naturally, this would have involved some debate in the Senate but Dio, again, does not present such debate as important for informing imperial policy. Instead, Hadrian used the foremost men as judicial advisors and the use of μετὰ, rather than διὰ, underlines that this differs from Hadrian's interactions with the Senate. Hadrian is not Dio's favourite emperor but Dio is certainly not wholly critical either. ⁷⁵ Indeed, this description parallels the behaviour of Augustus, Tiberius and Vespasian in the sense that Hadrian showed the Senate respect by communicating important matters to this body but deliberated with handpicked advisors rather than the Senate as a whole. ⁷⁶

⁷³ Cass. Dio 65[66].10.5.

⁷⁴ Cass. Dio 69.7.1.

⁷⁵ See e.g. Cass. Dio 69.7, 69.9 with Madsen 2016, 151-2.

⁷⁶ There is one more passage that may merit brief attention. Maecenas encourages Augustus at length to allow the senators to function as judges in cases involving their

Thus, once we look closely at Dio's phrasing, there is in fact no emperor in his narrative who is clearly portrayed as genuinely consulting the Senate. Instead, the positively described emperors consistently use advisors instead. To this group may be added Nerva who, according to Dio, "did nothing without the advice of the foremost men" (ἐπραττε δὲ οὐδὲν ὅ τι μὴ μετὰ τῶν πρώτων ἀνδρῶν).⁷⁷ Nerva is one of Dio's few idealised emperors and it is striking that he too uses advisors for all important business. It is worth noting that the description of Nerva's interaction with his advisors as μετὰ τῶν πρώτων is identical to that of Hadrian. Likewise, Marcus Aurelius is praised for providing Commodus with prominent senators as advisors, but the young emperor rejected their counsel.⁷⁸ Furthermore, Claudius is praised for reviving the custom of using advisors after Tiberius' stay in Capri but is criticised for being influenced by women and freedmen.⁷⁹ Septimius Severus is lauded for handling judicial matters "excellently" since "he gave us, his advisers (ἡμῖν τοῖς συνδικάζουσιν), full liberty to speak".⁸⁰ By contrast, Dio severely criticises Caracalla since "he asked no one's advice".⁸¹ Thus, it is a *Leitmotiv* in Dio's *Roman History* that good emperors used capable advisors to direct imperial policy, whereas bad emperors rejected advisors or employed incompetent ones.

It is important to note that Dio's construction of the ideal emperor and the importance ascribed to the *consilium* contrasts with a long tradition of senatorial writing which had instead praised emperors who deliberated genuinely with the Senate and included it in government. For example, Suetonius briefly mentions the Augustan *consilium* but then adds that "on questions of special importance he called upon the senators to give their opinions".⁸² Thus, Suetonius' idealised Augustus uses the Senate as a key deliberative organ, in sharp contrast to Dio's Augustus. Furthermore, Tiberius in Suetonius is likewise praised for the fact that "there was no matter of public or private business so small or so great that he did not lay it out

peers and then comments: "These matters, then, should be referred (ἀνατίθει) by you to the senate, and also those others which are of the greatest importance to the state" (Cass. Dio 52.32.1). Maecenas then continues to argue that senators should be involved in judging their peers (Cass. Dio 52.31-32). Given the context, the quoted passage probably refers specifically to the judicial matters involving senators. If Maecenas is referring to important matters in general, it would likely be another example of how the emperor should communicate to, not consult, the Senate.

⁷⁷ Cass. Dio 68.2.3.

⁷⁸ Cass. Dio 73[72]1.2.

⁷⁹ Cass. Dio 60.2.4, 60.4.3.4.

⁸⁰ Cass. Dio 77[76]17.1.

⁸¹ Cass. Dio 78[77].11.5. See also Cass. Dio 78[77].17.3.

⁸² Cass. Dio *Aug.* 35.4.

before the senators (*ad patres conscriptos referretur*)",⁸³ and Suetonius then gives a long list of examples.

Tacitus praises Tiberius for similar behaviour: "public affairs – together with private affairs of exceptional moment – were treated in the Senate, and discussion was free to the leading members (*apud patres tractabantur, dabaturque primoribus disserere*), their lapses into subservency being checked by the sovereign himself".⁸⁴ A final example, can be drawn from Pliny's panegyric in which his idealised Trajan "exhorted us, individually and collectively, to resume our freedom, to take up the responsibilities of the power we might be thought to share, to watch over the interests of the people, and to take action" (*singulos, nunc universos adhortatus es resumere libertatem, capessere quasi communis imperi curas, invigilare publicis utilitatibus et insurgere*).⁸⁵ Thus, both Suetonius and Tacitus present an ideal according to which the emperor engaged in frank debate in the Senate to inform imperial policy, and Pliny's ideal includes the Senate as a governmental partner which may even share actual power with the emperor.⁸⁶ Dio's ideal government, in which the emperor discussed imperial policy in the *consilium* but did not genuinely use the Senate as a forum for debate, is thus distinctive and deviated from a long tradition of senatorial writing.⁸⁷

It may appear surprising that Dio is not encouraging emperors to consult the Senate about important matters. However, the senators as a group had played a significant role in the fall of the Republic and, as we have seen, Dio pointed out that most men are not virtuous. Indeed, Dio asserts that Augustus thought it difficult to find three hundred men worthy of the Senate, but ultimately enrolled six hundred in the Senate in connection with his purge.⁸⁸ It is also important to note that Dio is critical of the senators, whose behaviour is often portrayed as deeply problematic and irresponsible. This parallels the Republic and further justifies Dio's praise for emperors who did not engage in genuine debate with the senators as a whole. This critique of the senators is evident even in the books of the idealised Augustus as, for example, the senators' political competition turns destructive several times: Augustus was periodically absent from Rome in Book 54 and the consular elections therefore caused

⁸³ Cass. Dio *Tib.* 30.1.

⁸⁴ Tac. *Ann.* 4.6.

⁸⁵ Plin. *Pan.* 66.2.

⁸⁶ Although the inclusion of *quasi* may be understood as a hint that this power-sharing was illusory.

⁸⁷ For a comparison of Dio's ideal government with the parallel sources, see Madsen forthcoming. See also Roller 2015.

⁸⁸ Cass. Dio 54.14.1.

rioting among the populace.⁸⁹ Shortly afterwards, “factious quarrelling (στάσις) again took place and murders occurred”⁹⁰ because of the consular elections, and Augustus now takes assertive action and appoints the remaining consul himself.⁹¹ Augustus is also forced to return to Rome to avoid further unrest.⁹² This problem is again present in Book 55 where Augustus has to appoint “all who were to hold office, because there were factional outbreaks (ἐστασιάζετο)”.⁹³ In short, the moment Augustus left the capital, the senators resorted to their republican ways and created serious disturbances through their competition for offices. This suggests that the senators more broadly had changed little compared to the Republic, which legitimises Augustus’ exclusion of this body from real power and his consultation of the *consilium* rather than the Senate. Importantly, this diverges markedly from imperial writers such as Tacitus who contrasts the sycophancy of imperial senators with a supposedly more virtuous elite of the Republic.⁹⁴

The senators’ problematic behaviour is also evident in their disinclination to even attend Senate meetings and Augustus has to institute numerous measures in Book 54 to ensure senatorial attendance. First, Augustus increased the fines for being late “since the members of the senate showed a lack of interest in attending its sessions”.⁹⁵ He then has to cancel a law stipulating that at least 400 senators had to be present to pass decrees since “there were not many present at the meetings of that body”.⁹⁶ This problem continues to be present in Book 55 where Dio enumerates several wide-reaching measures by Augustus to ensure senatorial attendance.⁹⁷ Dio even notes that the mentioned measures were only the most important ones regarding attendance at senatorial meetings and underlines both the large numbers who had transgressed the old rules on this area and that some senators disregarded these new decrees as well.⁹⁸ Augustus is thus consistently portrayed as attempting to force the senators to attend meetings but they are highly intransigent. The disinclination of the senators to even attend meetings further illustrates why Maecenas never envi-

⁸⁹ Cass. Dio 54.6.1-2.

⁹⁰ Cass. Dio 54.10.1.

⁹¹ Cass. Dio 54.10.2.

⁹² Cass. Dio 54.10.5.

⁹³ Cass. Dio 55.34.2.

⁹⁴ See e.g. Tac. *Ann.* 3.60 with Roller 2015, 19-20. Indeed, Strunk 2017, 6 has recently argued that Tacitus should be seen “not as a monarchist but as a republican”.

⁹⁵ Cass. Dio 54.18.3.

⁹⁶ Cass. Dio 54.35.1.

⁹⁷ Cass. Dio 55.3.1-2.

⁹⁸ Cass. Dio 55.3.1-3.

sions the Senate as a key deliberative organ for shaping imperial policy and why Augustus and his idealised successors rely on advisors instead. However, Augustus' struggles to ensure a functioning Senate was arguably not just due to its administrative functions in Dio's eyes. As set out above, Maecenas highlighted that the Senate played an important role in lending authority to the new regime and its policies, and it was therefore important to have a functioning Senate.

This problematic behaviour by the senators continued under Tiberius, as exemplified by the elections of new magistrates: "in case there was ever a deficiency of candidates, or in case they became involved in irreconcilable strife (φιλονεικία ἀκράτῳ), a smaller number were chosen. Thus, in the following year, [...] there were only fifteen praetors; and this situation continued for many years".⁹⁹ This suggests that the senators either failed to furnish enough praetors or, just as under Augustus, engaged in destructive competition, and Dio underlines that this continued for a long time. Importantly, φιλονεικία had also been a key destructive characteristic of the senators during the Republic, which highlights that the senatorial body had not been transformed by Augustus' purges and other measures.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, the lack of praetors is found nowhere in Tacitus' longer account and Dio thus appears to have chosen this detail purposefully in order to support his negative presentation of the senators.

The senators also engage in constant flattery under Tiberius which is presented as highly problematic.¹⁰¹ For example, Dio asserts that the senators "led Sejanus to his destruction by the excessive and novel honours bestowed upon him". Indeed, "it was chiefly these honours that had bereft him of his senses".¹⁰² Thus, according to Dio, the senators had encouraged Sejanus' excessive ambition through their excessive honours. This mirrors Dio's claim that it was the senators' inordinate honours that caused Caesar's downfall.¹⁰³ The senators also vote excessive and novel honours to Tiberius, which are often unparalleled in other sources.¹⁰⁴ Tiberius rejects these offers but, importantly, the Senate's proposals are portrayed as causing Tiberius to become increasingly tyrannical: "as a result of these very measures (ἐξ αὐτῶν τούτων) he began to grow more suspicious of them [the senators] [...], and dismissing utterly from his thoughts all their

⁹⁹ Cass. Dio 58.20.4-5.

¹⁰⁰ *Contra* Madsen 2019, 117-19 who argues that Augustus revitalises the Senate. On φιλονεικία and the Republic, see Rees 2011, 27-30, 121-3.

¹⁰¹ As pointed out by Platon 2016.

¹⁰² Cass. Dio 58.12.6. Earlier in Dio's account, Tiberius had actually been one of the catalysts for the extravagant honours for Sejanus: Cass. Dio 57.19.7.

¹⁰³ Cass. Dio 44.3.

¹⁰⁴ Cass. Dio 58.17.2-4

decrees, he bestowed honours both in words and in money upon the praetorians [...] in order that he might find them more zealous in his service against the senators".¹⁰⁵ Thus, the flattery of the senators is portrayed as the direct cause for Tiberius basing his power on the praetorians. Also under Tiberius, then, the senators are depicted highly negatively by Dio. Against the background of Dio's portrayal of the senators under Augustus and Tiberius, the praise for emperors who consulted the *consilium* about imperial policy rather than the Senate seems more natural.

4 Conclusion

I have suggested that Dio's ideal government entailed an emperor who ruled with undivided power in consultation with handpicked advisors but who did not use the Senate as an important deliberative forum: Maecenas suggests that the emperor should not share power with the Senate, which fits Dio's conviction that human nature precluded power from being shared stably. Furthermore, Maecenas indicates that the emperor should not engage in genuine debate in the Senate. Rather, all power should be held by the emperor and he should rule in cooperation with the best men, whose advice should inform imperial policies. Importantly, Dio's ideal emperor, Augustus, follows this advice as he consistently uses advisors rather than engaging in genuine debate in the Senate, and Tiberius in his idealised period does likewise. The same picture is evident in the narrative of those successors of Tiberius whom Dio describes positively: none of them is clearly described as consulting the senators about important matters, whereas numerous emperors are praised for their use of advisors, along the same lines as Augustus and Tiberius. By contrast, Dio often criticises negatively described emperors for using unsuitable advisors or rejecting advisors altogether.

Dio's positively described emperors still communicated important matters to the Senate and made sure to have their laws enacted by the Senate, as advised by Maecenas. This would have produced some senatorial debating but Dio never portrays this as a desirable outcome that informs imperial policy. Rather, Dio presents such debate as a way for Augustus to appear δημοκρατικός and Maecenas underlines that formal senatorial approval for the emperor's laws provided them with authority and prestige. Thus, in Dio's eyes, the Senate was a venue in which trials took place and embassies were received, and its members should be entrusted with important offices. It has also recently been argued persuasively that Dio idealises the time of

¹⁰⁵ Cass. Dio 58.18.2.

the adoptive emperors where the next emperor was picked from tried and tested senators.¹⁰⁶ In general, Dio underlines the importance of respecting the Senate, which may have functioned to encourage the emperor to be a *primus inter pares* rather than a tyrant. However, the Senate is not presented as an important forum of debate for informing imperial policies. It is noteworthy that Dio emphasises that the emperor should be advised by “the foremost men”, or a similarly described group, which no doubt was supposed to be almost exclusively senatorial. Yet, there is a fundamental difference between using individual senators as advisors and the use of the Senate as a deliberative forum in which all senators took part.

It may at first be surprising that Dio does not envision a more significant role for the Senate in the Empire. However, when we view Dio's narrative in its entirety, this becomes easier to understand: the senators had been involved in destructive competition ever since the start of the Republic and this problematic behaviour was key to the fall of the Republic. Importantly, the senators' destructive competition under Augustus and Tiberius parallels the senators of the Late Republic, and nothing suggests that the senators as a whole improve with the advent of empire. This is unsurprising since, according to Dio, “it does not belong to the majority of men to acquire virtue”. Against this background, it is not surprising that Dio's Maecenas suggests that the emperor should rule in cooperation with handpicked advisors, rather than the Senate, or that Dio's idealised emperors follow this suggestion. This minimal role for the Senate in Dio's ideal government contrasts with the tradition of senatorial writing which idealised emperors who consulted the Senate and included it in government. Furthermore, Dio's distinctive ideal government challenges the widespread view of Dio as a “senatorial historian”: Dio was of course a senator and his history is coloured by this perspective, but his senatorial status did not lead him to glorify a “senatorial monarchy” with a prominent role for the Senate, as has traditionally been argued.

The Roman emperor had in fact ruled in cooperation with a small and changing group of advisors called the *consilium* since Augustus, and Dio had experienced this *modus operandi* first-hand through his own participation in the *consilium* which, at least under Septimius Severus, he frames very positively.¹⁰⁷ Dio thus presents us with a strikingly pragmatic and realist view of the Senate's ideal role in imperial government: he is not suggesting a utopian revolution where the Senate should share actual power with the emperor or displace the *consilium* as the key deliberative forum. Rather, Dio is simply suggesting that the emperor employ good (senatorial) advisors and

¹⁰⁶ Madsen 2016; 2019, 50-6.

¹⁰⁷ Cass. Dio 77[76].17.1.

engage with them in genuine debate to determine imperial policies. This may appear unambitious but not all emperors relied on suitable advisors: given that Dio had experienced rulers such as Commodus, Caracalla and Elagabalus, frequent civil wars and the, according to Dio, excessive influence of men such as Plautianus, it is no surprise that he became a pragmatist whose ideal government in many ways merely mirrored the rules of emperors such as Augustus or Vespasian. An emperor who simply respected the Senate, reserved important magistracies for its members and included able senators as advisors could easily be an ideal in the age of “iron and rust”.¹⁰⁸

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¹⁰⁸ Cass. Dio 72[71].35.4.

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Cassius Dio and the Principate

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Between Civilitas and Tyranny: Cassius Dio's Biographical Narrative of the Flavian Dynasty

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Abstract In Cassius Dio's account of imperial Rome, the Flavian Dynasty represents all the strengths and weaknesses of monarchical rule. The strength is represented with Vespasian, his display of modesty and understanding of the need to cooperate and share power with the senatorial elite. The weakness is described through the nepotism, betrayal, and uncontrolled ambition for glory and prestige that helped Domitian to power and forced the return of tyrannical rule upon the Romans. In this chapter, I shall discuss the way in which the Flavian narrative serves as a microcosm in the *Roman History* to demonstrate the reason for which dynastic succession was incapable of providing the stability needed for monarchical rule to reach its full constitutional and political potential.

Keywords Cassius Dio. The Flavian dynasty. Dynastic succession. Principate. Vespasian. Titus. Domitian.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Dio's Books on Flavian Rome. – 3 The Ideal Monarchy. – 4 Vespasian the New Augustus. – 5 Titus: Between *Civilitas* and Tyranny. – 6 Domitian: Tyranny Returns. – 7 Conclusion.




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1 Introduction

As Vespasian rode into Rome in the fall of 69 to receive the Senate's approval as the next *princeps*, he, or rather his officers, had not only brought a year of political chaos, unrest, and civil war to conclusion; his accession to the throne with his two grown sons Titus and Domitian also replaced the Julio-Claudians with his own dynasty.¹ In the aftermath of the civil war, Rome was soon filled with hope of a new beginning; and Vespasian – an experienced member of the Senate and a proven commander – soon took a number of steps to present himself as a more modest and respectful 'first among equals' than his predecessors who acknowledged the wisdom of the Senate and held the well-being of the commonwealth close at heart.² The contemporary historiographical sources that have come down to us present the founder of the Flavian dynasty as a self-restrained man who lived a humble life, but also as one who divided the Romans. Suetonius describes Vespasian's modest background and his tolerant and merciful nature; Tacitus underlines that even if there were reasons to criticise the fiscal policies of the new emperor or his choice of associates, Vespasian was nevertheless the only *princeps* to have improved after his accession, and his victory in the civil war was the best outcome for Rome.³

As a man from a modest Italian background who worked his way up the Roman *cursus honorum*, Vespasian did not follow his accession with wide-ranging constitutional changes similar to those ushered in by the wars between Pompey and Caesar or the wars that followed the latter's murder, even if measures were taken in the *lex de imperio Vespasiani* to formalise his powers.⁴ Upon coming into power, Vespasian signalled a break from the Julio-Claudian dynasty and the depraved, luxurious, and wasteful form of despotic culture they represented, where young men such as Gaius and Nero – unprepared for and largely indifferent to the task ahead of them – ruled through the terror of unpredictability, or when older men such as Tiberius and Claudius developed an uneasy relationship with the senators, whom they began to prosecute for treason at a later point in their reigns.

In his Imperial narrative, Cassius Dio describes the accession of Vespasian as an intermezzo in an otherwise steep political decline starting with the death of Augustus and as a short step in the right di-

¹ For an introduction to the life of and career of Vespasian see Griffin 2000, 1-11; Mellor 2003, 69-74.

² Mellor 2003, 80-4.

³ Suet. *Vesp.* 1.1, 12; Tac. *Hist.* 2.84, 1.50, 2.97. See also Griffin 2000, 3-4; Mellor 2003, 80. Reitz 2010, 1.

⁴ Mellor 2003, 80-1. Mantovani 2009, 125-7.

rection that would show later emperors a better path forward. In that sense, Dio's narrative of Vespasian is both a return to what he saw as values introduced in the age of Augustus and a tale of an enlightened form of civilised monarchy brought to Rome by Vespasian.⁵ Judging from what remains of Dio's coverage of the Flavian dynasty, the reign of the three Flavians proved to be a rather mixed experience. With the death of Titus – who started out on a positive note – Domitian acceded to the throne in 81 and initiated what Dio describes as fifteen years of tyrannical rule. Once again the Romans were exposed to the arbitrary will of a single ruler, which in their view equalled tyrannical rule, and the reign of a envious and immodest young monarch who, in order to compensate for his lack experience and insecurity, humiliated and marginalized the senators into passive spectators.⁶ Rome had once again come under the sway of an intolerable despot. The Senate was no longer consulted with the intention of hearing their honest opinion, and no longer in a position in which they were free to offer their best advice. Instead, they were humiliated publicly and prosecuted in disputable *maiestas* trials. But with the death of Domitian and the succession of Nerva, an aged senator with considerable political experience, the monarchical form of rule finally reached its best years: the ill and highly exposed *princeps* went outside his family to adopt Trajan as his heir and successor and lay the ground for Rome's golden age.⁷

2 Dio's Books on Flavian Rome

To use the words of Charles Murison, the books on the Flavian reign hardly exist; they are merely a narrative now assembled from Byzantine epitomes, excerpts, and scattered fragments.⁸ Even if we see the outline of a historical account that goes beyond the year 70, where Tacitus' *Histories* breaks off and Josephus finishes his Jewish War – which is valuable in itself – it is not the traces of Dio's *historical narrative* as such that are the most interesting consideration. More rewarding from an analytical point of view are the historian's asides on the nature of monarchy and how to organise it in its ideal form, of which we can still see glimpses in the epitomes written in 11th-12th-century Byzantium by Xiphilinus and Zonaras. Yet it is just as difficult to recover Dio's theorization of the ideal monar-

⁵ Cass. Dio 65.10.5; Madsen 2016, 149-50.

⁶ Cass. Dio 66.26; on the terrified passivity of the Senate see also Tac. *Agr.* 43-46; Suet. *Dom.* 10; Pliny *Pan.* 48, 66. See also Woodman 2014, 304-8, 308-9; Madsen 2014, 26-7.

⁷ On the issue of Rome's supposed golden age see Noe in this volume.

⁸ Murison 1999, 1-3.

chy from the evidence of the epitomes as it is to use them to reconstruct the historical chronology; the same methodological problems apply in both cases. The reconstruction of Dio's approach to monarchical rule under the Flavians relies on the unsettling premise that the epitomes are reasonably faithful to Dio's text or to the points the historian sets out in the original. Just as Dio's historical narrative is complicated by the considerable later abridgements of the original text – for example, Xiphilinus' deletion of phrases or entire episodes, and Zonaras' tendency to paraphrase – so too is the attempt to identify Dio's thought on monarchical rule under the Flavians challenged by Xiphilinus' criteria for selection or deletion. As pointed out by Murison, Xiphilinus shortened Dio's original text by cutting out sentences and passages that he found irrelevant for his readers and his own interests, but he left Dio's own words to stand for themselves.⁹ This may well be true in most cases, but as demonstrated by Christopher Mallan, there are sufficient examples to demonstrate that Xiphilinus adapted the historian's (original) reasoning to align more fully with his own (new) historical analysis.¹⁰ Some of these examples are directly relevant in the attempt to reconstruct Dio's thought on ideal rule. In Xiphilinus' epitome of Dio's Republican books, the Byzantine scholar either cut out the speeches altogether, mentioned them only briefly (as in the case of the Agrippa-Maecenas dialogue, a centrepiece of the historian's political and constitutional framework), or offered an abbreviated version of them. That Xiphilinus could remove or paraphrase so important a dialogue poses a methodological problem for the reconstruction of Dio's political philosophy: to rely on the epitome alone is insufficient, since it is in the speeches that Dio conveys his own opinion on political and constitutional matters.¹¹

Another problem pointed out by Mallan is the way in which Xiphilinus transforms the *Roman History* to give the reader what was in his view a better explanation of Caesar's death. Whereas Dio understands the political crises in the Late Republic and the murder of Caesar as the result of a structural crisis – as laid out in the opening of book 44, where monarchical rule is offered as the only solution to the deep lack of modesty among Rome's political actors (44.1-3) – Xiphi-

⁹ Murison 1999, 2-3; Berbessou-Broustet 2016, 82-3.

¹⁰ See Mallan 2013, 611-12 and 617-18 for discussion of the wide scale of Xiphilinus' deletion of Dio's original from his epitome, including perhaps up to three-quarters of Dio's Imperial narrative and even more in the Republican books.

¹¹ For a discussion of the debate between Gabinius, Catulus, and Pompey see Coudry 2016; Burden-Strevens 2016, 193-5; Burden-Strevens, 2020, 14-21. For a reading of Dio's speeches as literary rather than historical debates see Fomin 2016, 237. On how the Agrippa-Maecenas dialogue offers the reader an insight to Dio's own political views see also Adler 2012, 483. Burden-Strevens 2021; Pistellato forthcoming b.

linus is more interested in the importance of human character. Compared to the opening of Dio's book 44, Xiphilinus' focus on the importance of human character provides a considerably different text. The epitome struck out the entire constitutional discussion, a key passage for the understanding of Dio's political thought; it introduced instead a passage dismissing Dio's analysis, which had linked Caesar's assassination to the dysfunction of the political system and the disharmony emerging from ambition and greed for glory. Instead, the Byzantine scholar offers Plutarch's reading that Caesar was murdered because of Brutus's natural urge for freedom.¹²

We perceive, then, that Xiphilinus frequently modified the original text of Dio in his *Epitome*. However, the narrative Xiphilinus provides of the reign of the Flavians nevertheless appears to retain both the wording of Dio's original as well as the historian's original assessment of the Flavians and their rule. It is precisely here, in Xiphilinus' focus on the character of the actors, that we may deduce how our historian described and assessed the reigns of Vespasian, Titus, and Domitian respectively: their conduct as emperors and their relationship with members of Rome's political elite.

3 The Ideal Monarchy

Dio's account of the Flavians is especially interesting in that it offers a case study of the difference between legitimate monarchical rule on the one hand, and the despotic suppression of free citizens by a tyrant on the other. As we shall see in the following, the historian uses the Flavian dynasty to demonstrate the challenges monarchical rule in the form of the Roman Principate faced as it progressed, and particularly when it depended on dynastic succession. In Dio's description of the Flavian dynasty we can detect a circular life span: a beginning, a period of growth, and then a decline that echoes the cycle of other forms of constitution, already familiar in Greek political thought. By showing how Vespasian's promising accession and constructive cooperation with the Senate was replaced by what he describes as the tyrannical reign of Domitian, Dio offers a microcosm within his Imperial narrative which, judging again from what little remains of the original text, allows the historian to demonstrate the inherent fallibility of dynastic succession and the threat it posed to legitimate sole rule.

Dio's overall approach to Roman politics is negative. Rooted in Thucydides' *Realpolitik* and his focus on human arrogance, Dio's account offers a gloomy narrative of man's predisposition to choose

¹² Mallan 2013, 624-5. Berbessou-Broustet 2016, 89-90.

himself and his associates over the good of the commonwealth.¹³ To handle this notorious lack of self-restraint and limit the competition for power and prestige, communities (in the historian's view) would have to be organised as monarchies, where one man held the power to enact new laws and to choose the magistrates and commanders he believed most fit for their administrative and military tasks. In Dio's eyes, even a rather ordinary sole ruler was therefore to be preferred over many men of the same quality simply because sole rule, where the monarch selected magistrates and commanders, would limit the competition that in turn would lead to political violence and in the end to civil war (44.2.1-2.) But what also clearly emerges from Dio's Imperial narrative is that to attain the ideal monarchical rule, the Romans would have to strive to prevent it from declining into tyranny, the perversion of legitimate monarchical rule or kingship.¹⁴ Once again the danger lay in the lack of moderation (τὸ σῶφρον), which would come into play if the monarch failed to uphold the balance between being first and respecting his former peers, or if members of the political establishment lost interest in politics now that the competition for power and prestige was no longer free.

Dio elaborated his belief in the ideal form of monarchical rule in book 52 of his *Roman History*, staged as a dialogue between Agrippa and Maecenas on whether Augustus was to choose a republican form of government or monarchical rule as part of his settlement.¹⁵ If we accept the consensus among scholars that what Maecenas and Agrippa offer are reflections of Dio's constitutional thinking, he therefore argues in favour of a form of monarchical rule, where the monarch should be handed what was essentially undisputed powers. He would be the one responsible for enacting new laws. He should introduce the laws in consultation with the best men, the senators, without any interference from the people, but the responsibility was his alone. It would be his responsibility to select senior magistrates and commanders – again without any meddling on the part of the Senate or the candidates themselves, as that would only encourage the same unfruitful competition that previously stood in the way of mod-

¹³ See Thucydides on greed (3.81) and on envy (3.84). On Dio's inspiration from Thucydides see Millar 1964, 6; Rich 1990, 11; Rees 2011, 79-80.

¹⁴ See Polyb. 6.4 for the oft-cited view that the lifespan of any given constitutional form may be seen as circular, with a beginning, a period of growth, and a decline; on the pervasion of constitutional forms see also Arist. *Pol.* 3.7.

¹⁵ For studies on Dio's Agrippa-Maecenas dialogue, see Hammond 1932, 101-2 for a reading of the dialogue as a reflection of Dio's view of the evolution of the Principate; see also Aalders 1986, 296-9; Reinhold 1988, 165, 170; Fomin 2016, 217-20; Adler 2012, 512; Burden-Strevens 2021. For the suggestion that Dio was not as in favour of monarchy as is generally suggested, see Manuwald 1979, 8-26.

esty and harmony.¹⁶ These absolute powers were to be balanced by the monarch's show of respect both for the Senate but also for some of Rome's other institutions, particularly the courts, and a profound sense of modesty in the display of power and status.¹⁷ In addition, the competent monarch should avoid divine honours, which Dio describes as an empty political gesture (52.35.5). To avoid conflicts of interest and to ensure free trials, it was important that the monarch hand any cases of treason over to a court of senators so that he did not convict any of his own alleged enemies (52.32.1-2).¹⁸

In his coverage of the reign of Augustus, Dio depicts an emperor who overall follows Maecenas's advice. Augustus determination to keep the senators involved in the administration of public affairs is underlined by a series of initiatives that were to encourage or force the senators, who were gradually losing interest in the decision-making process, to reassume political responsibility as Imperial advisors. To increase the attendance at Senate meetings, Augustus is said to have announced dates of meetings well in advance on days where no other business took place that would require the attention of the senators. Fines for not attending were put in place, a quorum of how many senators had to attend to meetings was introduced in order for the decisions to stand, and the opportunity to preview new laws before the meetings was made available so that members could prepare themselves for the discussion and offer their most qualified advice (54.18.3; 55.3.1-6; 55.4.1-2).¹⁹ It is here, in the inclusion of the Senate as an advisory board, that Dio sees the difference between legitimate monarchical rule and tyranny. The rule of the monarch had to be absolute; Dio does not suggest any form of check and balance between the emperor and the Senate in the Agrippa-Maecenas dialogue, nor in his coverage of Augustus' reign. What Dio suggests as his ideal is not a mixed constitution but rather absolute monarchy, where legitimacy lay in the acceptance of the need for one-man rule and a quite undefinable show of modesty on the part of emperor both in terms of the display of his status and in his recognition that decisions should be made in consultation with men of experience.²⁰

16 For Maecenas' advice regarding how Augustus was to select commanders and senior magistrates himself, see Cass. Dio 52.14.3, 52.15.2; On senior magistrates see 52.20.2-3. For the monarch's responsibility to all appropriate laws in consultation with the Senate and entirely without a popular vote see 52.15.1.

17 See Cass. Dio 52.20.5 for the Senate's obligation to remain in charge of the legal process.

18 Ando 2016, 569-71.

19 See Dio's description of how Augustus' manipulated the Senate into offering him *imperium* and full control over Rome's legions (53.11).

20 On the mixed constitution see Carsana 1990, 59-60; Carsana 2016, 557-8. See also Bono in this volume.

Vespasian was a man of considerable political and military experience who had worked his way up the career ladder in Roman politics. As someone who had served in all the junior and senior magistracies and as a commander in the Eastern provinces and in Britannia under Claudius, Vespasian had the right experience and balanced confidence to offer Rome a new beginning. When we consider Dio's narrative – not just the Imperial books, but the totality – the Flavian Dynasty appears as a break, in which the political and cultural decline of Augustus' Julio-Claudian successors was (temporarily) intermitted. Vespasian and his way of managing his undisputed powers is seen by Dio as a step in the right direction, but not as the solution. As powers passed first to Titus and later to Domitian (whom Dio, like most other ancient commentators, describes as a tyrant), the decline continued into a new reign of terror.

It is often argued that Dio's thoughts on Rome's constitution and monarchical rule in the age of Augustus should be read more as reflections of the historian's contemporary experience with the Severan dynasty than an attempt to describe real historical circumstances in the first century BCE.²¹ Other scholars have seen Dio's preference for monarchical rule as a symptom of his own preference for safety, stability, and privileged senatorial status over real political influence.²² Dio was, just like historians in general, influenced by his own time and by what he experienced personally from his acquaintance with Roman politics and the imperial administration; he surely feared civil war and political prosecutions. Yet, as I argue in the following, Dio wanted more than well-defined social status, personal safety and show of respect on the part of the emperor. Instead, he argues in favour of a form of monarchy according to which the Senate has real influence on the decision-making process – not directly as the right to enact laws or choose magistrates, but indirectly: first, through offering their honest advice in a respectful discussion between emperor and Senate of what would be the best way forward; and secondly, through a form of succession which selects the new emperor from the pool of qualified, proven and virtuous senators with the right set of political, military, and personal skills to rule in a fair and beneficial way.

The form of sole rule Dio envisaged is a kind of representative monarchy: the emperor, being a former senator himself, represents the Senate and holds the interests of the commonwealth as his priority. In the way in which he lays out his thoughts on ideal rule, Dio follows

²¹ Bleicken 1962, 448; Reinhold 1988, 165–8. Reinhold, Swan 1990, 169–70; *contra* Rich 1989, 98–100; 1990, 14–15. See Kemezis (2014, 90–4) for Dio's use of the Republican and Augustan books as response to the Severan dynasty and their official narrative.

²² Millar 1964, 74–7; On *libertas* in the age of the Principate see Wirszubski 1950, 169–71. See Pettit 1997, 35–41 on how laws can ensure freedom; see also Kapust 2004, 294–98; Strunk 2017, 23–37. On Republican ideals of *libertas* see also Arena 2012, 45–8.

Tacitus' reasoning in the *Agricola*: Rome's elite, men like Agricola, had to come to terms with the reality of the Principate and accept that serving diligently as governor may be prizeworthy in itself and a resolution of one's purpose as an aristocrat, particularly under bad emperors.²³ But in laying out his own guidelines for avoiding the accession of incompetent emperors, Dio goes a step further than Tacitus. One explanation for his development of this political program is that he, unlike Tacitus, lived to see the potential in adoptive succession and the return of chaos when first Marcus Aurelius and later Severus passed the throne to their sons.

4 **Vespasian the New Augustus**

Dio aligns Augustus with the ideals of monarchical rule established above, and they form a benchmark against which he measures Vespasian and his sons. In what is left of the book dedicated to Vespasian's rule, the first of the Flavian emperors represents a return to the political stability that the historian ascribes to Augustus' settlement in the 20s BCE.²⁴ In Dio's coverage, Vespasian was the first *princeps* since Augustus to have chosen a form of government in which the senators were offered a role in the decision-making process; like Augustus, he allowed senators to speak freely in order to use their advice to make the best decisions.²⁵ Judging from Xiphilinus' epitome, Dio stages the first of the Flavians as a political game-changer who reversed years of decline by adopting some of the same values for which Augustus is acknowledged. Accepting the methodological challenges of the different forms in which the books of Augustus and Vespasian respectively have come down to us, there are several parallels between Dio's presentation of Augustus' dealings with the Senate and Xiphilinus' epitomes of the reign of Vespasian. Both emperors secured supreme rule after winning civil wars; both took it upon themselves to change the dominant political culture when they, again in Dio's view, replaced previous oligarchic or despotic regimes with beneficent and enlightened one-man rule. Furthermore, both Augustus and Vespasian came into power with alternative backgrounds to those of their predecessors: Augustus as a young man with no senatorial background, and Vespasian as an average member of the Julio-Claudian Senate from a modest Italian background.

²³ See Tacitus on the way in which Agricola's diligent administration of Britannia allowed him to fulfill his purpose in life as a servant to the state (Tac. *Agr.* 42.4); see Woodman 2014, 302-3; see also Atkins 2018, 82-3.

²⁴ On the division of Dio's books in the Flavian dynasty see Murison 1999, 3-5.

²⁵ For ancient and modern comparison of Vespasian to Augustus see Griffin 2000, 1, 11.

Just as Dio's Octavian fought to free the Romans from war and slavery of factions, Vespasian's alleged prudence and tolerance stood in antithesis to the prodigal life of the craven and incompetent Gaius and Nero. Both Augustus and Vespasian had a solid grip on power but were, again in Dio's version, keen to involve the senators, whose advice they both valued. Both Augustus and Vespasian took firm control over the state at a moment when the constitutional cycle was at a historical nadir: Augustus after the collapse of the Republic and the most destructive civil war in the history of Rome, and Vespasian at a moment in imperial history when Nero's lack of commitment and unlimited cruelty led a degenerated monarchy towards the first civil war since the 30s BCE. In Dio's opinion, Nero was the worst of the depraved Julio-Claudian emperors because he did not care at all about the empire; instead, he left its administration in the hands of advisors and freedmen. But when he finally got involved, he followed the worst example of them all:²⁶

Cass. Dio 61.5.1 παραγγέλματα αὐτῶν συγχέας καὶ καταπατήσας πρὸς τὸν Γάιον ἔτεινεν. ὥς δ' ἅπαξ ζηλώσαι αὐτὸν ἐπεθύμησε, καὶ ὑπερεβάλετο, νομίζων τῆς αὐτοκρατορικῆς καὶ τοῦτ' ἰσχύος ἔργον εἶναι, τὸ μηδὲ ἐν τοῖς κακίστοις μηδενὸς ὑστερίζειν.

[Nero] lost all shame, dashed to the ground and trampled underfoot all their precepts, and began to follow in the footsteps of Gaius. And when he had once concerned a desire to emulate him, he quite surpassed him; for he held it to be one of the obligations of the imperial power not to fall behind anybody else even in the basest deeds.²⁷

With the accession of Vespasian, Rome appears to return to the political practice that Augustus introduced as part of his settlement in the 20s. The senators – free from fear – are now encouraged to assume roles as the emperor's trusted advisors, whose criticism and counsel the new *princeps* values:

Cass. Dio 65.10.5 καὶ τοῖς πάνυ φίλοις καὶ πρὸ τῆς ἑω ἔν τε τῇ εὐνῇ κείμενος συνεχίνετο, καὶ ἕτεροι ἐν ταῖς ὁδοῖς αὐτὸν ἡσπάζοντο. αἱ τε θύραι τῶν βασιλείων ἠνεωγμέναι διὰ πάσης τῆς ἡμέρας ἦσαν, καὶ φρουρὸς οὐδεὶς ἐν αὐταῖς ἐγκαθειστήκει. ἔς τε τὸ συνέδριον διὰ παντὸς ἐφοίτα, καὶ περὶ πάντων αὐτοῖς ἐπεκοίνου, κὰν τῇ ἀγορᾷ πολλάκις ἐδίκασεν.

²⁶ Pistellato forthcoming a.

²⁷ All translations are taken from Cary 1914-1927.

With his intimate friends he would hold converse even before dawn while lying in bed; and others would greet him on the streets. The doors of the palace stood open all day long and no guard was stationed at them. He regularly attended the meetings of the Senate, whose members he consulted on all matters, and he frequently dispensed justice in the Forum.

There is a sharp contrast here between the description of Vespasian's respectful rapport with the senators and the arrogant and disrespectful disposition of the Julio-Claudian emperors toward the Senate, which they then either despise or humiliate in an attempt to strengthen their own position. The difference between Vespasian and his Julio-Claudian predecessors is further underlined by the following paragraph in the epitome, in which Vespasian is praised for the humility of his sons: out of respect for the senators, they read his messages out loud to the Senate when the emperor himself was unable to attend. This mutual respect is further underlined in the account of how Vespasian invited both senators and others to dine as his guests (65.10.6).

These references to Vespasian's uncomplicated and modest nature – his approachability of access, his respect for the opinions of the Senate, and his eagerness to resolve disputes without trials and prosecutions – are other elements in Dio's portrait of Vespasian as a competent emperor who serves as an antithesis to the Julio-Claudian dynasty.²⁸ With his modest nature, Vespasian fits Dio's definition of the ideal emperor. He was unpretentious, humble, and (importantly) an experienced senator who knew the value of including the political elite in his decisions. The remark on his performance at Senate meetings carries a lot of weight: it testifies both to his predecessor's absence and also to Vespasian's willingness to listen to the thoughts and concerns of his peers. This was precisely what Dio claims Augustus did by welcoming the senators to speak freely and by arranging matters so as to encourage the senators to take a real interest in the decision-making process, fulfilling their intended and historic role as an advisory council to the magistrates.

The execution of Helvidius Priscus that Vespasian orders is touched upon briefly in the epitome. What Suetonius describes as a complicated and damaging conflict for Vespasian is in 65.12, covered merely as a justified reaction to unreasonable opposition on the

²⁸ For Dio's description of Vespasian's affable nature see 65.11.1-3. For comparison to the Julio-Claudian emperors see 57.1.1-6 or comments on Tiberius' dishonest and manipulative nature, see 59.10.7 and 59.22.3-4. for Gaius' lavish. See also Pistellato in this volume. For Claudius' dependence on his freedmen, see Cass. Dio 60.2.4.

part of the rebellious Priscus.²⁹ Therefore in the version of Dio's text that we have from Xiphilinus, Priscus is said to have used his right to speak freely as a means to stir up the masses with the aim to overthrow; he was therefore responsible for his own end.

Dio considered the reign of Domitian to be a catastrophe and a setback from the harmonious and cooperative government of emperor and Senate. Vespasian had already offered an alternative form of government that later emperors could allow themselves to be inspired by (although Domitian chose not to). As we shall see in the following, not only Augustus but also Vespasian is used as a role model for the emperors in the second century when monarchical rule was at its most stable. In that sense, Dio presents the reign of the adoptive emperors as a representative monarchy whose origins lay in the programme first of Augustus and then of Vespasian; the latter serves to bridge the depraved Julio-Claudians and the emperors from Nerva to Marcus Aurelius. Dio is well aware that Hadrian's claim to the throne after Trajan was far from justified and he knew only too well that Marcus Aurelius, another of his heroes, left the throne to his only son after the true nature of Commodus was known (73[72].1.1-2).

On the other hand, it is with the combination of an experienced and virtuous emperor on the one hand (possessing political and military skills honed through membership of the Senate), and a responsible elite on the other hand, that monarchical rule reaches its full potential. That understanding was being developed already in the reign of Augustus, who struggled to convince the remnants of the Republican senators to accept their new role as advisors. These were concerns Augustus had to attend to several times during his reign and something the senators did not fully realise until they reflected upon Augustus' achievements after his death (56.43-44). From what we may judge from the epitomes, it was Vespasian who inspired men like Nerva, Trajan, and Marcus Aurelius with the model of his treatment of the Senate. With the accession of Titus, monarchical rule and the Flavian dynasty *per se* were already descending into a new period of tyrannical rule. This may not have been felt as a sudden change or crisis at first, but rather as a miniating presence beneath the surface of a seemingly competent and experienced leader with strong military credentials.

²⁹ Suet. *Vesp.* 15.

5 Titus: Between *Civilitas* and Tyranny

Dio's account of Titus' years in power may at first appear positive. Like his father, Titus had already proven his ability as a capable military commander who ended the Jewish revolt. In Rome, after his accession, Titus chose, just as Vespasian had done before him, a mild strategy towards the Senate; we hear that he also refrained from killing any senators, even those accused of conspiracy (66.18-19.). What may seem a quality, as it surely was in the case of Vespasian, is reversed and used as an example of how dysfunctional dynastic succession is when nepotism prevents the emperor (in this case Titus) from making the right decision. Titus did indeed keep his promise not to kill any senators; but in so doing he failed to protect himself against the conspiracies of Domitian, who should have been removed for plotting against him. In Xiphilinus' and Dio's versions, it was Domitian himself who eventually killed Titus; other writers believed he died a natural death, but Titus would not allow his brother to be removed in any case (66.26.2).

A further example of Dio's questioning (and perhaps coded critique) of Titus can be found in his speculation over the possible reasons for his good reputation. Dio questions whether Titus would have turned to the worse had he ruled longer, just as Augustus changed for the better over his many years in power (66.18.3-4):³⁰

Cass. Dio 66.18.3-4 ἤδη δὲ καὶ ὅτι ἐπὶ βραχύτατον, ὥς γε ἐς ἡγεμονίαν εἰπεῖν, ἐπεβίω, ὥστε μὴδ' ἁμαρτίαν τινὰ αὐτῷ ἐγγενέσθαι. δύο τε γὰρ ἔτη μετὰ τοῦτο καὶ μῆνας δύο ἡμέρας τε εἴκοσιν ἔζησεν ἐπ' ἐννέα καὶ τριάκοντα ἔτεσι καὶ μῆσι πέντε καὶ ἡμέραις πέντε καὶ εἴκοσι. καὶ αὐτὸν ἐξ ἴσου κατὰ τοῦτο τῇ τοῦ Αὐγούστου πολυετία ἄγουσι, λέγοντες ὅτι οὐτ' ἂν ἐκεῖνος ἐφιλήθη ποτὲ εἰ ἐλάττω χρόνον ἐζήκει, οὐτ' ἂν οὗτος εἰ πλείονα.

Again, his satisfactory record may also have been due to the fact that he survived his accession but a very short time (short, that is, for a ruler), for he was thus given no opportunity for wrongdoing. For he lived after this only two years, two months and twenty days – in addition to the thirty-nine years, five months and twenty-five days he had already lived at that time. In this respect, indeed, he is regarded as having equalled the long reign of Augustus, since it is maintained that Augustus would never have been loved had he lived a shorter time, nor Titus had he lived longer.

³⁰ Murison 1999, 179-80. On *civilitas* in Dio and his Greek translation for this term (δημοκρατικώτατος), see Wallace-Hadril 1982, 44; Bono 2018, 94-7. See also Bono in this volume. On how Dio was skeptical about the elite's ability to share power see Noe this volume.

This may seem a bit of a stretch, but what comes into play here is Dio's scepticism towards dynastic rule, which – surely encouraged by his own experience of the Severans – he viewed as incompatible with a more representative and stable form of government.³¹ If Dio allowed Titus to be a successful emperor, he would also have to admit that dynastic succession could work if the successor, such as Titus, had the necessary skills and the right attitude to rule in a responsible, modest, and inclusive manner. The idea of a qualified son would probably not have been entirely inconceivable to Dio; but history had proven that the random male relative was usually not able to maintain a civilized relationship with the Senate and usually not particularly interested in exposing himself to the illusion of inclusive government with the senators in the role of his honest and diligent advisors. So, in order to make the case as clearly as possible, Dio highlights – as Suetonius did in his biography of Domitian – the way in which Domitian introduced tyrannical rule after having killed his brother, and he blames Titus for allowing it to happen.³²

6 Domitian: Tyranny Returns

The reign of Domitian represents a new low point in Dio's history of Imperial Rome. Compared to Vespasian and Titus, Domitian stands out as the despot who ruled alone, leaving the senators behind humiliated and terrorised. In Dio's surviving text for the reign of Domitian, the last of the Flavian emperors comes out as hateful, irrational, and sadistic, having no intention to cooperate with the Senate. He ruled through fear as exemplified by the dinner party that Dio, as the only source for the event, describes in detail: the theme was silence, death, and darkness, and the emperor alone spoke of death and slaughter (67.2.1-7; 67.9.1-6).³³ Dio further relates that Domitian did not follow his brother's policy of not killing any senators but instead murdered or banished several good men in the course of his reign (67.3.3¹-67.3.4²). Domitian's vanity is underlined by examples of his penchant for self-proclaimed extraordinary honors such as the titles of 'master' and 'god'; this again stands in sharp contrast to the conduct of both Vespasian and Augustus, who, again according to Dio, were hesitant to accept any divine honors.³⁴ Domitian's inability to defend the empire

³¹ On the Severan disappointment and the failure of the Severan dynasty see Madsen 2016, 154-8. See also Rantala 2016, 161-5.

³² Suet. *Tit.* 9., *Dom.* 2.

³³ For a thorough analysis of Dio's use of the dinner to underline Domitian's sadistic tendencies when he terrorises the Roman elite, see Schulz 2016, 286-92; 2019, 26-8.

³⁴ On Augustus' reluctance to accept the personal cult see Cass. Dio 51.20.6-8.

is illustrated in the account of his failure to pacify the Quadi, Marcomanni, and the Dacians. As commander, Domitian is said to have been a disaster. He accuses others for his own failures but shares none of the successes, even those for which he was not responsible in the first place (67.6.4). Furthermore, as emphasised by Verena Schulz, the triumphs Domitian celebrated are disputable and were said to have been undeserved: the emperor took no hostages and weakly allowed himself to be deceived even by inferior enemies (67.7.2-4.).³⁵

It has been demonstrated that Domitian was not as incompetent as our sources make him out to be.³⁶ But what matters here is not whether Dio overstates Domitian's tyrannical tendencies or his alleged lack of leadership. Young Domitian, unlike Nero, showed a real interest in government. Yet, he would have been difficult to stomach for an elite now accustomed to being acknowledged as an esteemed social group that had recently enjoyed respect as the emperor's valued advisors. It is therefore to be expected that Domitian's more obvious autocratic rule provoked a reaction from the empire's intellectuals, who, as demonstrated by Schulz, offered an alternative to the official panegyric version represented by the writings of Martial and Statius.³⁷ On that note, we see fear and revulsion represented in the writing of Tacitus and Pliny, who both did well under Domitian and obviously needed to explain their own behaviour and the circumstances they were in at the time.³⁸ On the other hand, criticism of Domitian and the type of emperor he represented goes beyond any personal need to distance oneself from a fallen, unpopular regime. Like Dio Chrysostom, both Tacitus and Pliny offer opinions on how to organize monarchical rule in so different a way that the emperor may rest his powers on the empire's political elite; this testifies to how the elite's experience of Domitian, and of the Flavians more broadly, did generate a theoretical debate among the empire's political commentators.³⁹

In this context, it is worth noting that Dio holds the Senate to be largely blameless for the development of autocratic rule. Instead, it is the emperor's sole responsibility to include the Senate in the decision-making, something that in Dio's view rests with the undisputed right to enact new laws. Because there are no checks and balances between the emperor and the Senate, the senators cannot force

³⁵ Schulz 2016, 280-2.

³⁶ See Jones 1992, 192 for discussion of the reception of Domitian's reign: Jones argues that his monarchy was not, in fact, so different from that of other emperors and that his persecutions of senators had led to an unbalanced view of his relationship with the aristocracy in general.

³⁷ Schulz 2016, 279-80, 284, 286-92.

³⁸ Tac. *Hist.* 1.1.; Plin. *Pan.* Ash 2009, 86. Woodman 2009, 38-41.

³⁹ Dio Chrys. *Or.* 3.43-46; Pliny *Pan.* 66.2-4. Tac. *Agr.* 42.3-4. Atkins 2018, 82.

their advice upon the emperor. Such a political philosophy differs from Tacitus' criticism of the Senate's failure in refusing to share power shortly after Tiberius' accession, and from Pliny's claim that Trajan ordered the senators to be free and take a responsibility for the good of the commonwealth.⁴⁰

Dio pays essentially no attention to the plots against the emperor; this again exemplifies that it was never his intention to offer a balanced account of Domitian's years in power, nor to explain why Domitian turned out in way he did or behaved in the manner he chose to. Instead, as Schulz points out, Dio's ambition was to sketch out and criticise the type of emperor Domitian represented and, secondly, to attack the emperors of his own time.⁴¹ Dio no doubt drew up archetypes of good and bad emperors in order to comment on contemporary politics: he used his portrait of Domitian, Nero, and others to guide his readers toward what he believed was the best form of monarchical rule. Yet in addition, there are elements in Dio's writing to suggest that his coverage of the Flavian dynasty goes a step further than providing archetypes or models for emulation and blame. He uses his account of the three Flavians to demonstrate the instability of dynastic succession in general, when power passes to unqualified, cruel, or indifferent random male heirs. This is precisely the cycle that was broken, in Dio's eyes, when Nerva adopted Trajan and chose competence and talent over family and ethnicity.

Cass. Dio 68.41-2 Οὕτω μὲν ὁ Τραϊανὸς Καῖσαρ καὶ μετὰ τοῦτο αὐτοκράτωρ ἐγένετο, καίτοι συγγενῶν τοῦ Νέρουα ὄντων τινῶν. ἀλλ' οὐ γὰρ τῆς τῶν κοινῶν σωτηρίας ὁ ἀνὴρ τὴν συγγένειαν προετίμησεν, οὐδ' αὖ ὅτι Ἰβηρ ὁ Τραϊανὸς ἀλλ' οὐκ Ἰταλὸς οὐδ' Ἰταλιώτης ἦν, ἥτιόν τι παρὰ τοῦτο αὐτὸν ἐποιήσατο, ἐπειδὴ μηδεὶς πρόσθεν ἀλλοεθνὴς τὸ τῶν Ῥωμαίων κράτος ἐσχέκει· τὴν γὰρ ἀρετὴν ἀλλ' οὐ τὴν πατρίδα τινὸς ἐξετάζειν δεῖν ᾔετο.

Thus Trajan became Caesar and later emperor, although there were relatives of Nerva living. But Nerva did not esteem family relationship above the safety of the State, nor was he less inclined to adopt Trajan because the latter was a Spaniard instead of an Italian or Italiot, inasmuch as no foreigner had previously held the Roman sovereignty; for he believed in looking at a man's ability rather than at his nationality.

⁴⁰ See Seager 1972, 129-31; Levick 1999, 75-7.

⁴¹ For the deconstruction of Domitian and the official version of his reign and how this historiography serves as criticism of emperor's in Dio's own lifetime see Schulz 2016, 276-9, 292; Schulz 2019, 264-5.

Dio knew old Nerva had few other choices than to ally himself with Trajan, one of the strongest generals at the time. But again, what matters to Dio is to demonstrate that adopting the next emperor in line from the pool of experienced and virtuous senators could provide the missing piece that would ensure continuous political stability for the Principate.⁴²

To prove his point, Dio provides a series of examples from the reign of Nerva and the adoptive emperors, in which the civil *principes* rule in harmony with Rome's political elite. Nerva melted the statues of Domitian, promised that he would not kill any of the senators, and did nothing without first consulting the foremost men (Cass. Dio 68.1). Trajan promised not to kill or exile any good men, and instead honoured those who did well and paid no attention to rumours and slander that under other emperors would have led to prosecution (68.5.2). And Hadrian – despite his questionable claim to the throne – is described as a competent emperor who managed to discipline the army (69.2.5; 69.9.4), and who made arrangements to ensure that the tradition of adoption continued not only after his death but also after the death of his successor Antoninus Pius (69.20-21).⁴³

7 Conclusion

The accession of Vespasian was a step in the right direction and the experienced senator managed to introduce a mode of government that survived Domitian. In Dio's view, he set new standards for the relationship between the emperor and the Empire's political elite which grew to their full development in the second century, Dio's golden age. Vespasian was, to Dio, an example of an ideal emperor who thanks to his senatorial experience brought monarchy back on the tracks that Augustus had laid out as part of his settlement. Now, the Flavian dynasty did not bring any long-term solution to the ever-present risk that the Principate might become tyrannical. The explanation Dio offers is that dynastic rule from the outset was dysfunctional and tyrannical: it was bound to favour family relations over quality. Similar examples in Dio's narrative can be found in the accounts of the Severan dynasty – where Septimius Severus fails to remove Caracalla when he realised the true nature of his son – or in the description of Augustus' rationale for choosing Tiberius, whose misrule Augustus

⁴² See Frascchetti 2008, 48 and Madsen 2016, 153 for discussion of Dio's idealising attitude toward adoptive succession.

⁴³ For a detailed discussion of Hadrian's adoption speech of the next emperor in line, see Davenport, Mallan 2014, 643-4, 657-8.

hoped would later cast a more favourable light on his own Principate.⁴⁴

It may well have been Dio's ambition to tell the story of the Flavian emperors as accurately as he could; nevertheless, his aims for accuracy are complicated by his choice of a wider narrative in which Vespasian was the example of the ideal emperor, Titus was a naïve and inattentive emperor whose love for his brother threw the empire back into chaos and tyranny, and Domitian was a tyrant who had no intention to include the Senate in his government. While Dio's portrayal of Domitian fits the trend among other ancient writers, the account of Titus is far more peculiar and an example of the historian's deliberate shaping of his project – not only to create a certain historical narrative, but also to deliver a proactive vision of why dynastic succession was unlikely to produce the stable and civilised form of monarchical rule Rome needed (and particularly in the turbulence of the third century). In this way he questioned family succession at a time when the Severan dynasty was the new leading family in Roman politics. Dio was not prepared to accept that dynastic rule would ever work. Accordingly, he could not acknowledge Titus' qualities as emperor and was therefore compelled to find reasons to undermine the impression of a reasonably well-equipped monarch: had he only had more time, he might have been just as disappointing as so many others.

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⁴⁴ On Caracalla's attempt on Severus' life see 77[76].14.3-4. For Dio's remark on how Augustus chose Tiberius so that he would shine even more and how the old emperor knew about the character of his adoptive son, see 56.45.1-3.

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Cassius Dio and the Principate

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Δημοκρατεῖσθαι or μοναρχεῖσθαι, That is the Question: Cassius Dio and the Senatorial Principate

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Abstract Cassius Dio's account of Caligula's principate pivots on the divide between Caligula's 'democratic' debut and his later decline into despotism. As Dio reports, the murder of the emperor in 41 CE polarised the Senate on the question of whether to abolish the Principate or to confirm it. It is likely that Dio's interest in such a crucial passage depends on his own experience of the end of Commodus and the accession of Pertinax in 192-193 CE. The underpinning of his political thought is Stoic: when the relationship between the princeps and the Senate collapses, the solution is not so much 'republicanism' as a 'republican spirit', to be intended as a fruitful cooperation between the two.

Keywords Cassius Dio. Roman History. Caligula and Claudius. Commodus and Pertinax. Cicero. Stoicism.

Summary 1 Viewing Caligula and Claudius from the Severan Perspective. – 2 Dio's Factual Models: Commodus and Pertinax. – 3 Conclusion: Stoicism in Action.

As has been convincingly shown in recent years, Cassius Dio's *Roman History* deserves special attention in many respects – and this is true even when what we have is not exactly Dio's text, but rather Dio's text epitomized, particularly when the epitomator's scissors do not change the substance of Dio's



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original writing.¹ Among others, Dio's account of the transition between emperors is quite revealing when we wish to focus on his view of the Principate as a system. As Marion Bellissime has argued, Dio is particularly keen on connecting his reflection upon the form of the state's government to a precise vocabulary.² Of course, the debate between Agrippa and Maecenas in Book 52 plays a key role not only in this respect, but also in the whole design of the *Roman History*.³ Nevertheless, turning to other major points of transition in Dio's *Roman History* may nuance our understanding of his interpretation of such events, both in practice and in theory. In this paper, I shall take the example of two crucial transitions to be analyzed in parallel: those from Caligula to Claudius, and from Commodus to Pertinax. The affinities between these two sets of parallels demonstrate the consistency and coherency of Dio's political thought regarding the proper government of the empire (and the Senate's role within it) across his imperial narrative, and the sophisticated ways in which he shaped his historiographical project so as to express that thought.

If one considers the principate of Caligula, some fundamental elements emerge. Caligula inspires the historian's reflection on Roman absolute power in relation to the Senate. Dio focuses on the polarization between Caligula's 'democratic' (*ciuilis*) debut and his later degeneration into despotism. The murder of the emperor (January 24, 41) polarized the very Senate itself. The unprecedented killing of the head of the Roman state called into question the constitutional problem of the *genus rei publicae*. Before the accession of Claudius the next day (January 25), in a moment when the Roman state was governed by the Senate with the consuls, opposite ideas of the *res publica* were debated, and the possibility discussed of whether to abolish or to confirm the Principate (Dio 60.1.1 = Xiph. 173.11-4). For the very first time, the legitimacy of the Augustan state was strongly called into question in the senatorial assembly. In this respect, Low has usefully offered a thorough overview of the problem, with special attention to this instance of republicanism under the Principate.⁴

In what follows, I first wish to discuss the events of January 41 by focusing on Dio's text, or on what is left of Dio's text, in parallel with

¹ See in general, e.g., Montecalvo 2014; Lange, Madsen 2016; Fromentin et al. 2016; Burden-Strevens, Lindholmer 2019; Osgood, Baron 2019; Burden-Strevens 2020; Lange, Scott 2020. As for Dio's epitomization, e.g. by Xiphilinus, see Mallan 2013; Berbessou-Broustet 2016; see also Zinsli 2017 and my discussion in this chapter. On other epitomators, such as Peter the Patrician and John of Antioch, see Roberto 2016a; 2016b; on Zonaras, see Bellissime, Berbessou-Broustet 2016.

² Bellissime 2016.

³ Bellissime 2016, 535-8. See also Ando 2016, 570-2.

⁴ Low 2013. As for the concept of 'republicanism' see, e.g., Rudich 1993; Kapust 2011; Gallia 2012; Wilkinson 2012; and again Low 2013.

the detailed account of Flavius Josephus about the senatorial debate following the death of Caligula, and with Suetonius' *Life of Caligula*. Secondly, I intend to show Dio's personal interest in such a crucial passage of the history of the Principate on the grounds of his own experience. He directly witnessed the death of Commodus on December 31, 192, and the rise to power of Pertinax on January 1, 193. This may have served as a model for Dio's analysis of the fall of Caligula and subsequent accession of Claudius. Thirdly, I shall point out the way in which Stoicism underpins – to a significant extent – Dio's attention to the relationship between the *princeps* and the Senate. When such relationship is at stake, the solution is not so much 'republicanism' as, rather, a 'republican spirit' true in its essence – the most fruitful cooperation between the *princeps* and the Senate for the sake of the Roman commonwealth. In this respect, the theoretical influence of Cicero's *De republica* and of Marcus Aurelius's political and philosophical model may have played a prominent role in shaping Dio's own reflection on the Principate between Commodus and Pertinax.

1 Viewing Caligula and Claudius from the Severan Perspective

The picture of the principate of Caligula that Dio offers from his point of view may be synthesized with Dio's own words:

Cass. Dio 59.3.1 δημοκρατικώτατός τε γὰρ εἶναι τὰ πρῶτα δόξας, ὥστε μήτε τῷ δήμῳ ἢ τῇ γε βουλῇ γράψαι τι μήτε τῶν ὀνομάτων τῶν ἀρχικῶν προσθέσθαι τι, μοναρχικώτατος ἐγένετο, ὥστε πάντα ὅσα ὁ Αὐγούστου ἐν τοσοῦτῳ τῆς ἀρχῆς χρόνῳ μόλις καὶ καθ' ἑν ἕκαστον ψηφισθέντα οἱ ἐδέξατο, ὧν ἕναι ὁ Τιβέριος οὐδ' ὅλως προσήκατο, ἐν μιᾷ ἡμέρᾳ λαβεῖν.

He had seemed at first most democratic to such a degree, in fact, that he would send no letters either to the people or to the Senate nor assume any of the imperial titles; yet he became most autocratic, so that he took in one day all the honours which Augustus had with difficulty been induced to accept, and then only as they were voted to him one at a time during the long extent of his reign, some of which indeed Tiberius had refused to accept at all.⁵

When Caligula debuted as *princeps* (March 18, 37), he somehow repeated Tiberius' debut in 14. The highest respect of the Senate and

⁵ Greek text is here and elsewhere from Boissvain's edition. All translations are from Cary 1914-1927.

the people was manifest.⁶ The Augustan spirit of the Roman Republic, relieved of the burdens of civil war, was there again.

It was, also, somewhat a Ciceronian spirit. In his *De republica* (published 51 BCE), Cicero had essentially foreshadowed the ideal of a sympathetic relationship between the Senate and an *optimus ciuis* chosen by the assembly and operating in accord with the senators to contribute to the government of the state – to an extent that may have, at least partly, influenced Augustus' own design of the Principate.⁷ I shall return upon this at a later point (§ 3), but it is worth anticipating that for Cicero, theoretically, the power conceded by the Senate to the *optimus ciuis* was balanced by the Senate's control, which was founded on the Senate's acknowledged authority (*auctoritas*).⁸ Such a mix produced what in the 2nd century – precisely and significantly, by the age of the Antonines – would be conceptualized as *ciuitas*, a word which, after its Suetonian first appearance – significantly again, primarily connected to Augustus –, happens to be the highest political result of Dio's ideal of a well-balanced, *ciuilis* monarchy.⁹ Along this line, which separates *ciuitas* with its kin concepts from its opposite, selfish *superbia* driving into *tyrannis* (despotism), the *genus rei publicae* chosen by Augustus experienced its unresolved tensions throughout the duration of the Principate.¹⁰

This is exactly what happened under Caligula, and Dio is aware of it. At the beginning of Book 59, Dio stresses the difference between Caligula's beginning and his end. There is an immense distance between Caligula's debut as δημοκρατικώτατος and his end as μοναρχικώτατος. The emperor evolved from being the most democratic, that is 'republican' in the sense of the old fashioned senatorial-consular form of government of the Roman state (the Roman state

⁶ See Brunt 2013, 296 on Tiberius.

⁷ See Augustus' words in the cute anecdote at Plut. *Cic.* 49.3, when the emperor paying visit to one of his daughter's sons (Gaius or Lucius Caesar) expresses his view on the man, but also on the politician and, I believe, on the political theorist: "A learned man, my child, a learned man and a lover of his country" (λόγιος ἀνὴρ, ὦ παῖ, λόγιος καὶ φιλόπατρις) (transl. from Perrin's Loeb edition).

⁸ See e.g. *Cic. Rep.* 1.39, 41, 43, 48, 49, 50, 55; 2.14-5, 43, 47, 51, 52, 56. Cf. Lepore 1954, 56-76, 201-18; Wallace-Hadrill 1982, 43; Ferrary 1995, 51-3. On the immediate impact of the *De republica* on its audience see e.g. Bréguet 1980, 162-5.

⁹ The first attestation of *ciuitas* is Suet. *Aug.* 51 (cf. *ThLL*, III, 1219.39-1220.8, s.v. «*ciuitas*»); on this development and on its reception by Dio, see Wallace-Hadrill 1982, 43-4, and fn. 90. On Dio's elaboration of the concepts of δημοκρατία and μοναρχία, see Urso in this volume.

¹⁰ On *superbia* as opposed to *ciuitas* in the relationship between the *optimus ciuis* (and later the *princeps*) and the Senate, see Wallace-Hadrill 1982, 33, 41, 46, and cf. *Cic. Rep.* 1.51 where *ciuitas* – the ensemble of the citizens of Rome – is opposed to the *superbia* of the rich men pretending to be the best. Of course, *ciuitas* is very much within the semantic sphere of the *ciuitas*. See *ThLL*, III, 1229.40-1240.29, s.v. «*ciuitas*».

being *res publica*), to being the most monarchic, that is ‘despotic’. His original ‘republican’ mood entirely inspired his deference toward the senatorial assembly. As Dio remarks, Caligula “promised to share his power with them and to do whatever would please them, calling himself their son and ward” (τὴν τε γὰρ ἀρχὴν κοινώσκειν σφίσι καὶ πάνθ’ ὅσα ἂν καὶ ἐκείνοις ἀρέσῃ ποιήσκειν ὑπέσχετο, καὶ υἱὸς καὶ τρόφιμος αὐτῶν λέγων εἶναι, 59.6.1) – a phrasing very much in line with Marcus Aurelius’ later reverence in addressing the Senate.¹¹

In Dio’s opinion, however, this was pure rhetoric: “the democracy was preserved in appearance, but there was no democracy in fact” (τὸ μὲν σχῆμα τῆς δημοκρατίας ἐσώζετο, ἔργον δ’ οὐδὲν αὐτῆς ἐγίγνετο, 59.20.4). With Caligula’s decline into tyrannical autocracy, the relationship between the emperor and the Senate deteriorated correspondingly. The outcome is nicely summarized by Seneca (*ben.* 2.12), who comments on Caligula allowing the distinguished senator Pompeius Pennus (consul suffectus in 39 or 40) to kiss his foot: “Is not this a trampling upon the commonwealth?” (*non hoc est rem publicam calcare?*), and by Suetonius (*Cal.* 49.1), who reports Caligula proclaiming, upon return from his extravagant German expedition of 39-40, that “to the Senate he would never more be fellow-citizen nor prince” (*se neque ciuem neque principem senatui amplius fore*). As for Dio, he focuses his attention on some symbolic issues. In 39, Caligula removed two consuls-elect from their office, and in parallel did something unheard-of: in order to emphasize the impact of his decision, he ordered that the consular fasces be broken in public.¹² Subsequently, he exiled the orator Carrinas Secundus for delivering a speech that explicitly addressed the problem of tyranny – obviously alluding to him.¹³ His degeneration was accelerated by his acquaintance with such eastern dynasts as Agrippa and Antiochus, whom Dio styles as Caligula’s τυραννοδιδάσκαλοι, ‘tyrant-trainers’ – though this label may well derive from the language of contemporary polemics against Caligula rather than Dio’s own imagination.¹⁴ Furthermore, Dio comments on the erratic behaviour of the emperor whenever the Senate proposed to bestow honours upon him. Caligula refused, Dio maintains, only because he wished to avoid seeming inferior to the senators by dignifying them with his acceptance.¹⁵

¹¹ Cass. Dio 72[71].33.2 οὕτως οὐδὲν ἴδιον ἔχομεν ὥστε καὶ ἐν τῇ ὑμετέρᾳ οἰκίᾳ οἰκοῦμεν (we are so far from possessing anything of our own that even the house where we live is yours).

¹² Cass. Dio 59.20.1-3.

¹³ Cass. Dio 59.20.6.

¹⁴ Cass. Dio 59.24.1 καὶ μάλισθ’ ὅτι ἐπυνθάνοντο τὸν τε Ἀγρίππαν αὐτῷ καὶ τὸν Ἀντίοχον τοὺς βασιλέας ὥσπερ τινὰς τυραννοδιδασκάλους συνεῖναι (And they were particularly troubled on ascertaining that King Agrippa and King Antiochus were with him, like two tyrant-trainers).

¹⁵ Cass. Dio 59.23.3.

The murder of Caligula in 41 left Rome without a *princeps*.¹⁶ As well as the tyrannicide, the hiatus itself was unparalleled in the young history of the Principate. But, of course, the Roman state remained with the Senate, and with the two consuls: Cn. Sentius Saturninus and Q. Pomponius Secundus. That is, the *res publica* was intact, as always. Nonetheless, this historic event raised the ‘constitutional’ problem of the *genus rei publicae*: after gathering on the Capitol in emergency conditions – and with the practical intention to watch over the public treasury –, the senators took opposing views on the way in which the Roman state ought to be governed. The ostensible dilemma was whether to abolish or to confirm the Principate. Claudius’ election was still yet to come. Dio informs us about the situation:

Cass. Dio 60.1.1 = Xiph. 173.11-4 καὶ πολλὰ καὶ ποικίλα γνῶμαι ἐλέχθησαν· τοῖς μὲν γὰρ δημοκρατεῖσθαι τοῖς δὲ μοναρχεῖσθαι ἐδόκει, καὶ οἱ μὲν τὸν οἱ δὲ τὸν ἡροῦντο.¹⁷

Many and diverse opinions were expressed; for some favored a democracy, some a monarchy, and some were for choosing one man, and some another.

The parallel in Suetonius has been conveniently underlined by Low.¹⁸ Two passages add elements to our discussion, as they show how seriously the idea of getting rid of the Caesars had been taken into consideration by sectors of the Senate (respectively *Cal.* 60.1 and *Claud.* 10.3):

Suet. *Cal.* 60.1 *neque coniurati cuiquam imperium destinaverunt; et senatus in asserenda libertate adeo consensit, ut consules primo non in curiam, quia Iulia uocabatur, sed in Capitolium conuocarent, quidam uero sententiae loco abolendam Caesarum memoriam ac diruenda templa censuerint.*

The conspirators too had not agreed on a successor, and the senate was so unanimously in favour of re-establishing the republic that the consuls called the first meeting, not in the senate house, because it had the name Julia, but in the Capitol; while some in expressing their views proposed that the memory of the Caesars be done away with and their temples destroyed.

¹⁶ Cf. Cass. Dio 59.29.1* = Joann. Antioch. fr. 84 M (vv. 6-7): the conjurers acted ὑπὲρ τε σφῶν καὶ τῶν κοινῶν ἐκινήθησαν (both on their own account and for the common good). On the circumstances of the assassination see Osgood 2016, 221-3.

¹⁷ Same wording in Zonaras 459.12-460.9.

¹⁸ Low 2013, 204.

Suet. *Claud.* 10.3 *Consules cum senatu et cohortibus urbanis forum Capitoliumque occupauerant asserturi communem libertatem.*

The consuls with the senate and the city cohorts had taken possession of the Forum and the Capitol, resolved on maintaining the public liberty.¹⁹

As Dio puts it, the question was whether to δημοκρατεῖσθαι or μοναρχεῖσθαι: that is, to go back to the old republican system or to persist with the new model conceived by Augustus. These are actually Xiphilinus' words, but despite skepticism on Xiphilinus' method of abridging Dio, I cannot see any particular reason to doubt that he is using Dio's original wording here.²⁰ The importance of this crucial passage in the history of the Principate is proven later on: Dio insists on the polarization within the Senate as he focuses on the first measures taken by Claudius to secure his position.²¹ As noted, before the accession of Claudius the transition was entirely upon the shoulders of the senators and of their most typical republican expression, the consuls. In this emergency the institutional role of the latter neatly emerges, and Mommsen did not miss the momentousness of the situation in his *Staatsrecht*.²²

Nothing changed, we know. The *res publica* was there, and so was the Principate. But in the *Jewish Antiquities* Flavius Josephus records the whole speech delivered by the consul Sentius Saturninus on that occasion.²³ He provides us with a valuable insight into what was going on after the death of Caligula. The oration apparently follows the Thucydidean precept of historical credibility of reported speeches:²⁴

Cass. Dio 19.172-4 ἐγὼ γὰρ τὰ παλαιὰ οἶδα ἀκοῇ παραλαβὼν, οἷς δὲ ὅψει ὁμιλήσας ἡσθόμην, οἷων κακῶν τὰς πολιτείας ἀναπιμπλάσιν αἱ τυραννίδες, κωλύουσιν μὲν πᾶσαν ἀρετὴν καὶ τοῦ μεγαλόφρονος ἀφαιρούμεναι τὸ ἐλεύθερον, κολακείας δὲ καὶ φόβου διδάσκαλοι καθιστάμεναι διὰ τὸ μὴ ἐπὶ σοφίᾳ τῶν νόμων, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τῇ ὀργῇ τῶν ἐφεσθηκότων καταλιπεῖν τὰ πράγματα. ἀφ' οὗ γὰρ Ἰούλιος Καῖσαρ

¹⁹ Latin text is from Ihm's Teubner edition. Translations are from Rolfe's Loeb edition.

²⁰ On skepticism on Xiphilinus' accuracy in the treatment of Dio's *Roman History* see esp. Millar 1964, 1-2; Mallan 2013 and Zinsli 2017, who highlight his omissions, (rare) additions and shortcuts. Yet, neither Mallan nor Zinsli do really call into question Xiphilinus' essential adherence to Dio's wording. A more positive assessment of Xiphilinus' method is offered by Berbessou-Broustet 2016, 82-7, 94.

²¹ Cass. Dio 60.3.5.

²² Mommsen 1887, 1143-4; see also Roda 1998, 206-7.

²³ AJ 19.167-80.

²⁴ Thuc. 1.22.1. See Galimberti 2001, 189; Wiseman 2013, xvi, 75-6; Pistellato 2015, 185 fn. 186.

φρονήσας ἐπὶ καταλύσει τῆς δημοκρατίας καὶ διαβιασάμενος τὸν κόσμον τῶν νόμων τὴν πολιτείαν συνετάραξεν, κρείσσων μὲν τοῦ δικαίου γενόμενος, ἥσσων δὲ τοῦ κατ' ἰδίαν ἡδονὴν αὐτῷ κομιοῦντος, οὐκ ἔστιν ὅ τι τῶν κακῶν οὐ διέτριπεν τὴν πόλιν, φιλοτιμηθέντων πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἀπάντων, οἱ ἐκείνῳ διάδοχοι τῆς ἀρχῆς κατέστησαν, ἐπ' ἀφανισμῷ τοῦ πατρίου καὶ ὥς ἂν μάλιστα τῶν πολιτῶν ἐρημίαν τοῦ γένναίου καταλείποιεν.

Past history I know from tradition, but from the evidence of my own eyes I have learned with what evils tyranny infects a state. For it frustrates all the virtues, robs freedom of its lofty mood, and opens a school of fawning and terror, inasmuch as it leaves matters not to the wisdom of the laws, but to the angry whim of those who are in authority. For ever since Julius Caesar was minded to destroy the democracy and caused an upheaval of the state by doing violence to law and order, setting himself above justice but really a slave to what would bring him private gratification, there is not a single evil that has not afflicted the city. All who succeeded him in the government vied with one another in abolishing our heritage and in allowing no nobility to remain among our citizens.²⁵

In spite of the undoubtful rhetorical style and literary reworking, the speech is theoretically powerful.²⁶ Saturninus explicitly castigates Caligula as a Roman tyrant. At the same time, he exalts the Senate as the authentic repository of the imperial power. The concept of *libertas* (freedom) is central.²⁷ In Saturninus' words, imperial despotism has been deeply rooted in Rome since the time of Julius Caesar, recognized as the first tyrant of Rome. Caligula is only the last and worst of Caesar's διάδοχοι (successors), who have overwhelmed the state and alienated the senatorial *nobilitas* from the possibility of the shared government of Rome. Saturninus depicts the Senate as the true heart of the *res publica*. This is a vital aspect.

We are obviously far from any realistic possibility of a return to the old Republic. Some senators may well have truly believed in it, but Sentius Saturninus is programmatically addressing the need to lay new foundations for the relationship between the Senate and the emperor.²⁸ The new deal must pivot on an equitable balance, and unsur-

²⁵ Greek quote from Niese's edition, translation from Feldman's Loeb edition.

²⁶ See also Low 2013, 202, 204-6; Bellissime 2016, 533-4.

²⁷ See Cogitore 2011 for a comprehensive analysis of *libertas* at Rome.

²⁸ Saturninus' speech may be historically plausible in its essence. A least two aspects deserve a little emphasis here: 1) the context of Josephus' narrative is extremely detailed, and most likely depending on a Roman (better, Latin and eyewitness) source (see e.g. Wiseman 2013); 2) the arguments provided by Saturninus are organized in exquisitely Roman oratory terms. Formally Saturninus' speech is indeed Roman, and its

prisingly Claudius did his best to cope with such a crucial instance.²⁹ In the *Roman History*, Dio stresses this point by recalling the polarization between ‘republicans’ and ‘monarchists’ in the Senate, an issue still outstanding after the accession of Claudius:

Cass. Dio 60.3.5 τοῖς γε μὴν ἄλλοις, οἱ τὴν δημοκρατίαν ἐκφανῶς ἐσπούδασαν ἢ καὶ ἐπίδοξοι λήψεσθαι τὸ κράτος ἐγένοντο, οὐχ ὅσον οὐκ ἐμνησικακήσεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τιμὰς καὶ ἀρχὰς ἔδωκεν.

As for the others, however, who had openly shown their eagerness for a democracy or had been regarded as eligible for the throne, Claudius, far from hearing malice toward them, actually gave them honours and offices.

The emperor proved to be moderate. He needed to grant an amnesty after the crisis, in order to secure his position.³⁰ His enthronement was disputed by a minority of senators, but strongly supported by the Praetorian Guard.³¹ In actuality, it was the very first time that an emperor was created with the substantial influence of the praetorians. This situation is very similar to Dio’s personal experience. He witnessed the praetorian influence, especially in March 193, with the death of Pertinax and the accession of Didius Julianus.

Such was the state of affairs. Although nothing really changed for the Roman state between 24 and 25 January 41, the old-fashioned republican spirit was adamantly in the air. The night before the accession of Claudius, an obsolete but truly republican practice was restored to its former glory. On the Palatine, in lieu of the emperor, the consuls gave the watchword to the praetorian tribune Cassius Chaerea, the killer of Caligula. And Josephus comments as follows:

Joseph. AJ 19.186-7 προεληλύθει δὲ ἡ νύξ ἐπὶ μέγα, καὶ Χαιρέας δὲ σημεῖον ἦτει τοὺς ὑπάτους, οἱ δὲ ἐλευθερίαν ἔδοσαν. ἐν θαύματι δὲ ἦν αὐτοῖς καὶ ὅμοια ἀπιστία τὰ δρώμενα· ἔτει γὰρ ἑκατοστῷ, μεθ’ ὃ τὴν δημοκρατίαν τὸ πρῶτον ἀφηρέθησαν, ἐπὶ τοὺς ὑπάτους σημεῖον ἢ παράδοσις οὗτοι γὰρ πρότερον ἢ τυραννηθῆναι τὴν πόλιν κύριοι τῶν στρατιωτικῶν ἦσαν.

contents are well known in Roman political oratory (cf. esp. Sallust’s speech of Lepidus, on which see La Penna, Funari 2015, 71-4, 170-223). More on the speech delivered by Saturninus in Pistellato 2015, 152-8, and 182-95 for a textual analysis.

²⁹ Osgood 2011; Buongiorno 2013.

³⁰ Buongiorno 2013, 66.

³¹ *RIC* 1² Claudius 97. On Claudius’ cautiousness, see Cass. Dio 60.3.2. See also Dio’s comment on the praetorian favour: 60.1.3^a. Further analyses in Osgood 2011, 30-1; Buongiorno 2013, 63-7.

And now, with the night far advanced, Chaerea asked the consuls for the watchword, and they gave 'Liberty'. This ritual filled them with wonder, and they were almost unable to believe their ears, for it was the hundredth year since they had first been robbed of the democracy to the time when the giving of the watchword reverted to the consuls. For before the city came under a tyranny, it was they who had commanded the armies.

Mommsen ranked this gesture among the very few exquisitely old republican elements to persist in the imperial period.³² The word chosen was *libertas*, which significantly stands out as the keyword of Saturninus' speech before the Senate. This projects us (as it projected them, indeed) one hundred years back: in 59 BCE Julius Caesar became consul for the first time. That moment was a turning point, as Josephus acknowledges. Caesar's first consulship not only marked the end of senatorial freedom, but put a full stop to the history of the old Republic.³³

The information we get from the *Jewish Antiquities* is extremely detailed, and most probably dependent on contemporary, and possibly eye-witness, source material.³⁴ We may rightly wonder whether Dio's full account would have been as detailed as that of Josephus, but from the epitomized section of Dio's Book 59 a well-focused accent emerges.³⁵ Themes are recurrent, such as that of the senatorial humiliation committed by the despot.³⁶ The question of whether to δημοκρατεῖσθαι or μοναρχεῖσθαι which the death of Caligula raised within the Senate seems to be part of Dio's interest in the institutional (dis)order of the Principate. In his time, the problem remained unsolved, as the facts proved. Of these facts he was a privileged observer.

2 Dio's Factual Models: Commodus and Pertinax

A situation that paralleled the transition from Caligula to Claudius occurred between December 31, 192 and January 1, 193, with the death of Commodus and the rise to power of Pertinax. Dio witnessed the troublesome principate of Commodus as a member of the Senate,

³² Mommsen 1887, 1086-7, and fn. 4. See also Eaton 2011, 59-61; Pistellato 2015, 159-60. On Caligula's funny but provocative watchwords, see *Sen. const.* 18.3; *Joseph. AJ* 19.29, 54, 105; *Suet. Cal.* 56.2; *Dio* 59.29.2.

³³ Pistellato 2015, 159.

³⁴ See Wiseman 2013, ix-xvi for a general discussion.

³⁵ Again, on Josephus' see Wiseman 2013.

³⁶ Pistellato forthcoming on Nero and the Senate.

and had a special deference to Pertinax, who designated him praetor for the following year.³⁷

Yet, one may argue, there had been another truculent transition in-between, similar to the events of both 41 and 192-193. On September 18, 96, Domitian was assassinated and Nerva took power. With the transition from Commodus to Pertinax a dynasty had come to an end, at least in terms of pure bloodline. Like Claudius, Nerva marked the impact of his enthronement as a restoration of freedom after years of despotism under Domitian.³⁸ Like Nerva, Pertinax was an old senator, although he was of decidedly less distinguished stock than the former. Nonetheless, like both his predecessors, Pertinax celebrated himself as the one who restored Roman citizens to freedom after Commodus' tyranny.³⁹ It is therefore especially disappointing that all we have of Book 68.1-4 on the principate of Nerva is epitomized, and that no direct quotes from Dio's original text were selected for the so-called *Excerpta historica Constantiniana*, one of the major collections of historical quotes at our disposal (mid-10th century).⁴⁰ More information from Dio on the principate of Nerva would have been of particular interest to the perspective of the present study.

Nonetheless, Dio's direct testimony of the events of 192-193 and the first assassination of a Roman emperor in 41 seem to be connected closely. Strong affinities between Caligula and Commodus were very clear to imperial historians and readers. These affinities were stimulated by the coincident birthday of both emperors, born on August 31.⁴¹ Furthermore, with the passage from Commodus to Pertinax the need to reaffirm the Senate's centrality in the Roman state reached a new peak. The events to follow demonstrated that such an instance was part of a much bigger issue, which included the relationship between the Senate and the military forces – in Rome and in the provinces. This remained the unsolved problem of the autocratic *res publica*, as Dio knew perfectly well.

³⁷ Dio 74.1.5 = Xiph. 283.10-13; 3.4 = Xiph. 284.7-12; 12.2 = Xiph. 289.17-23.

³⁸ CIL 6.472: *Libertati ab imp(eratore) Nerva Ca[es]ar[is] Aug(usto), anno ab urbe condita DCCCXXXIII XIII [kal(endas)] Oct(oberis)] restitu[tae] S(enatus) P(opulus)q(ue) R(omanus)*. See also Gallia 2012, 217-9. As for Claudius' initiatives celebrating *libertas*, see e.g. Low 2013, 208-10.

³⁹ Coins with the reverse legend *liberatis ciuibus* were issued, though they are rare as most of Pertinax' coins are: RIC 4.1, Pertinax, nos. 5-6. See Garzón Blanco 1990, 55-6, 59-61, but his discussion is insufficient. See also Manders 2012, 188 fn. 4.

⁴⁰ The circumstance is weird, since direct quotes from Dio in the *Excerpta* cover the principates of the Flavians, Trajan, Hadrian, Marcus Aurelius (as sole ruler) and Commodus. While Dio's text on Antoninus Pius and on the joint rule of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus had perished at an early stage (possibly late 5th century), the question raises: why is Nerva not included? No direct quotes from 68.1-4 were of particular interest at the time? See Juntunen 2013, 460-6.

⁴¹ Suet. *Cal.* 8; HA *Comm.* 1.2.

In this respect, some passages from Xiphilinus' epitome are quite telling. In 182 Commodus was the object of an unfortunate plot by Claudius Pompeianus, a prominent senator. As the emperor was entering the hunting-theatre, Pompeianus thrust out a sword in the narrow entrance, and famously said: 'See! This is what the Senate has sent you' ('ἰδοῦ, [...] τοῦτό σοι ἡ βουλὴ πέπομφεν', 73[72].4.4 = Xiph. 269.31-2). This is a little less explicit than the Latin version reported by the *Historia Augusta*: *hunc tibi pugionem senatus mittit* (Comm. 4.3).⁴² In spite of its failure, the development of this initiative was undoubtedly similar to the successful one against Caligula.

Ten years later, in 192, Commodus felt so secure in his position that he dared to give the epithet *Commodianus* to the Senate.⁴³ This may be a polemical exaggeration by Dio, who claims to report the exact opening words of an official letter sent by the emperor to the senators. Alternatively, it might be based on the model of municipal practices, which we know from epigraphic evidence.⁴⁴ As far as I know, no parallel evidence is known from Rome. Of course, the name of Commodus was erased from official inscriptions as part of the *damnatio* that followed his death.⁴⁵ Dio may simply be aiming here to emphasize Commodus' despotic eccentricity, and the passage proves to be effective. Nonetheless, a further passage where Dio offers his direct experience is even more persuasive. Commodus ordered senatorial families – including Dio's – to contribute money every year on his birthday for his odd expenditures.⁴⁶ "Of this, too, he saved nothing, but spent it all disgracefully on his wild beasts and his gladiators"

⁴² Latin text of the HA is (here and whenever quoted henceforth) from Hohl's Teubner edition.

⁴³ Cass. Dio 73[72].15.5 = Xiph. 276.22-9: αὐτοκράτωρ Καῖσαρ Λούκιος Αἴλιος Αὐρήλιος Κόμμοδος Αὐγουστος εὐσεβὴς εὐτυχής, Σαρματικός Γερμανικός μέγιστος Βρεττανικός, εἰρηνοποιὸς τῆς οἰκουμένης [εὐτυχὴς] ἀνίκητος, Ῥωμαῖος Ἡρακλῆς, ἀρχιερεὺς, δημαρχικῆς ἐξουσίας τὸ ὀκτωκαίδεκατον, αὐτοκράτωρ τὸ ὄγδοον, ὕπατος τὸ ἔβδομον, πατὴρ πατρίδος, ὑπάτοις στρατηγοῖς δημάρχοις, γερουσία Κομμοδιανῇ εὐτυχεῖ χαίρειν (The Emperor Caesar Lucius Aelius Aurelius Commodus Augustus Pius Felix Sarmaticus Germanicus Maximus Britannicus. Pacifier of the Whole Earth, Invincible, the Roman Hercules, Pontifex Maximus, Holder of the Tribunician Authority for the eighteenth time, Emperor for the eighth time. Consul for the seventh time. Father of his Country, to consuls, praetors, tribunes, and the fortunate Commodian senate, Greeting). Cf. HA Comm. 8.9: *senatus ... se ipsum Commodianum uocauit*.

⁴⁴ See e.g. CIL 14.3449 = ILS 400 referring to an *ordo decurionum Commodianorum* (l. 7).

⁴⁵ See Calomino 2016, 98-113.

⁴⁶ Cass. Dio 73[72].16.3 = Xiph. 277.8-11 + Exc. Val. 322 καὶ τέλος ἐν τοῖς γενεθλίοις τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ ἡμᾶς τε καὶ τὰς γυναῖκας ἡμῶν καὶ τοὺς παῖδας δύο χρυσοὺς ἕκαστον, ὥσπερ τινὰ ἀπαρχήν, κατ' ἔτος ἐκέλευσέν οἱ ἀποφέρειν, τοὺς τε ἐν ταῖς ἄλλαις ἀπάσαις πόλεσι βουλευτὰς κατὰ πέντε δραχμάς. καὶ οὐδὲν ἐκ τούτων περιποιεῖτο, ἀλλὰ πάντα κακῶς ἐς τὰ θηρία καὶ τοὺς μονομάχους ἀνήλiske (And finally he ordered us, our wives, and our children each to contribute two gold pieces every year on his birthday as a kind of first-fruits, and commanded the senators in all the other cities to give five denarii

(καὶ οὐδὲν ἐκ τούτων περιποιεῖτο, ἀλλὰ πάντα κακῶς ἐς τὰ θηρία καὶ τοὺς μονομάχους ἀνέλισκε, 73[72].16.3 = *Exc. Val.* 322), Dio comments bitterly. This is exactly how Caligula behaved.⁴⁷ Furthermore, some narrative patterns suggest similarities between the behaviour of Commodus on the one hand and that of Nero and Domitian on the other.⁴⁸ Later on, and quite tellingly, the *HA* will offer a canonical view of such identifications.⁴⁹

Shortly before his assassination, Commodus allegedly wished to kill both the consuls elected for 193.⁵⁰ This may well have prompted the conspiracy against him. It is also something that resembles what Caligula had done in 39, when he removed the consuls-elect. Caligula had done so because they had not proclaimed a thanksgiving on his birthday. The analogy with Dio's own testimony of Commodus ordering senatorial families to contribute gold pieces every year on his birthday may not be coincidental.

As Pertinax took power on January 1, 193, things changed radically – as with Claudius in 41. Pertinax immediately remedied the vexations suffered by the Senate. This was not only an obvious consequence of the death of Commodus. As a senior senator as well as a new man, Pertinax was particularly proud of his senatorial rank. Dio underlines one special aspect:

Cass. Dio 74.5.1 = Xiph. 284.30-32 καὶ ἔλαβε τὰς τε ἄλλας ἐπικλήσεις τὰς προσηκούσας καὶ ἑτέραν ἐπὶ τῷ δημοτικὸς εἶναι βούλεσθαι· πρόκριτος γὰρ τῆς γερουσίας κατὰ τὸ ἀρχαῖον ἐπωνομάσθη.

And he obtained all the customary titles pertaining to the office, and also a new one to indicate his wish to be democratic; for he was styled Chief of the Senate in accordance with the ancient practice.

The passage deserves proper attention. The title of πρόκριτος τῆς γερουσίας (*princeps senatus*, 'Chief of the Senate') was not new. It

apiece. Of this, too, he saved nothing, but spent it all disgracefully on his wild beasts and his gladiators).

⁴⁷ See e.g. Cass. Dio 59.21.4-6, 22.1.

⁴⁸ As for Nero, see Cass. Dio 73[72].17.3 = Xiph. 277.19-23; as for Domitian, see 73[72].14.4 = Xiph. 276.1-5; 21.1-2 = Xiph. 279.26-280.6.

⁴⁹ *HA Marcus* 28.10; *Comm.* 19.2.

⁵⁰ 73[72].22.2 = Xiph. 280.16-20 ὁ γὰρ Κόμμοδος ἀμφοτέρους ἀνελεῖν ἐβούλετο τοὺς ὑπάτους, Ἐρύκιόν τε Κλαῖρον καὶ Σόσσιον Φάλκωνα, καὶ ὑπατὸς τε ἅμα καὶ σεκούτωρ ἐν τῇ νομηνίᾳ ἐκ τοῦ χωρίου ἐν ᾧ οἱ μονομάχοι τρέφονται προελθεῖν· καὶ γὰρ τὸν οἶκον τὸν πρῶτον παρ' αὐτοῖς, ὡς καὶ εἰς ἐξ αὐτῶν ὧν, εἶχε (It seems that Commodus wished to slay both the consuls, Erucius Clarus and Sosius Falco, and on New Year's Day to issue forth both as consul and *secutor* from the quarters of the gladiators; in fact, he had the first cell there, as if he were one of them).

was an old republican title. Instead of ‘new’, as Cary misleadingly translated the Greek word ἕτερον, ‘another’ is thus preferable.⁵¹ Augustus and Tiberius – perhaps even Claudius, but evidence is very uncertain – had been styled as Chiefs of the Senate.⁵² In Dio’s words, the addition of the title was due to the wish Pertinax had to be recognized as ‘democratic’ (δημοτικός). The word δημοτικός is used once more by Dio with respect to Pertinax, in its superlative form δημοτικώτατος and in order to show the marked respect of the emperor toward his fellow senators.⁵³ It may be understood as an equivalent of the Latin word *ciuilis*, which as already shown indicates the virtue of the statesman, or, more exactly, of the senatorial statesman.⁵⁴ This is what Suetonius recognizes Claudius had proven to be during his principate, notably on the grounds of his relationship with the Senate.⁵⁵ δημοτικός may also be ‘republican’ in the sense of δημοκρατικός, which Dio uses as well and which is obviously related to Dio’s δημοκρατία, the old senatorial-consular form of government of Rome.⁵⁶ The first meaning is understood by Noè (1994, 110, referring to Cass. Dio 53.12.1), the second by Freyburger-Galland (1997, 122-3). However, δημοτικός is typically a classical Greek word used for ‘democrat’, and Dio employs it significantly when speaking of both Catos, well-established champions of nostalgic republicanism in imperial Rome.⁵⁷

In effect, the specification κατὰ τὸ ἀρχαῖον [...] ἐπωνομάσθη – further emphasized by the use of γάρ – stresses that the full title of *prin-*

⁵¹ See LSJ⁹, s.v. «ἕτερος», no. 3, esp. with ἄλλος in the same clause (with the example of A.R. 1.250).

⁵² See RGDA 7.2, both Greek and Latin versions (ed. Scheid 2007): πρῶτον ἀξιώματος τόπον ἔσχον τῆς συνκλήτου ~ [p]rinceps s[enatus]---. See Cass. Dio 53.1.3 πρόκριτος τῆς γερουσίας ἐπεκλήθη, ὥσπερ ἐν τῇ ἀκριβεῖ δημοκρατίᾳ ἐνενόμιστο (his [scil. Augustus] title was princeps senatus, as had been the practice when Rome was truly a republic). Suolahti 1972, 210, maintained the absence of the title between Augustus and Pertinax. Cass. Dio 57.8.2 πρόκριτός τε τῆς γερουσίας κατὰ τὸ ἀρχαῖον καὶ ὑφ’ ἑαυτοῦ <κατὰ τὸ ἀρχαῖον> ὠνομάζετο ([Tiberius] was called [...] Chief of the Senate, – the last in accordance with ancient usage and even by himself). As for its uncertain attestation under Claudius, see CIL 6.31545.11; Buongiorno 2013, 256-61. No comparable frequency is attested on inscriptions under Augustus or Claudius anyway. Tiberius was occasionally styled as *princeps senatus* by the Senate (Cass. Dio 57.8.2).

⁵³ Cass. Dio 74.3.4 = Xiph. 284.7 ἐχρήτο δὲ καὶ ἡμῖν δημοτικώτατα (he conducted himself in a very democratic manner toward us). See Ando 2016, 569 on this passage.

⁵⁴ ThLL, III, 1213.58-1219.38, s.v. «ciuilis»; see esp. OLD s.v. «ciuilis», no. 5. On the synonymy of *ciuilis* and *senatorius* see Plin. Pan. 2.7, and Wallace-Hadrill 1982, 46.

⁵⁵ Suet. Claud. 12.1 *At in semet augendo parcus atque ciuilis praenomine imperatoris abstinuit, nimios honores recusauit, sponsalia filiae natalemque geniti nepotis silentio ac tantum domestica religione transegit. Neminem exulum nisi ex senatus auctoritate restituit.*

⁵⁶ Cf. Dio 57.11.3, and see Wallace-Hadrill 1982, 44.

⁵⁷ Freyburger-Galland 1997, 110. See esp. Cass. Dio 43.11.6 on Cato the Younger. On earlier Greek use of the word, from Aristotle to Diodorus, see again Wallace-Hadrill 1982, 44.

ceps senatus had been disused for a long time.⁵⁸ With Pertinax, *princeps senatus* is attested on inscriptions to an impressive extent.⁵⁹ What Dio witnessed was indeed a special, unprecedented kind of restoration. By renewing a glorious, exquisitely senatorial title, both the Senate and its beneficiary marked an ideological statement. Even more importantly, *princeps senatus* marked a juridically established statement, as Pertinax was decreed, and thus juridically acknowledged, as the leader of the Senate.⁶⁰ In its turn the Senate, with its leader, seemed in a sense to have truly returned to power, as if the old Republic itself had resurged. The operation was audacious, and short-lived. It was entirely political, and frankly utopian, but under Pertinax the role of the *princeps senatus* gained new prominence and recovered its proper republican dignity.

Overall, the theoretical and political scope of the initiative of 193 was remarkable. With Augustus, the use of the title of *princeps senatus* had envisaged a thorough recovery of the stately order upset by the civil wars. The Senate had been its central element. Caligula was the first emperor who harshly offended the Augustan order. Later on Nero, then Domitian, and finally Commodus replicated the offence, and each and every time things went from bad to worse for the Senate. Of course, this overview may sound a little simplistic. Nevertheless, Dio's text allows us to believe that such sentiments were indeed current, especially after the tyranny suffered under Commodus. Hence the urgency of the action of the Senate in accordance with Pertinax. With the rehabilitation of the title of *princeps senatus*, the *statio principis* was firmly re-established beside the assembly that was strenuously believed to be the heart of the Roman state. This did not amount simply to a restoration of what, a century ago, Maurice Platnauer charmingly defined as "the Augustan dyarchy".⁶¹ The coupling of *princeps* and *senatus* signified a special kind of *Doppelprinzipat* within which the Senate shared power with the emperor, and the emperor shared power with the Senate.

There can be no doubt that this has nothing to do with any 'republican' landscape. Nonetheless, it cannot be denied that the experiment of 193 is anomalous in the history of the Principate. The question here is not so much whether to δημοκρατεῖσθαι or μοναρχεῖσθαι. It is, rather, how to make the Principate, that is an autocratic *res publica*, as truly 'republican' in essence as possible – first and foremost

⁵⁸ See Bonnefond-Coudry 1993, 130-1.

⁵⁹ *CIL* 2.5128.3, 3.14149.35.3, 14149.38.3-4, 14150.6.3, 14168a.3-4; *Samra* 34.3-4, 35.3, 36.3-4, 37.3-4, 38.2-3, 39.3, 40.1-2, 43.3-4, 50.1-2, 53.3-4; *CIL* 6.2102=32387=Schheid 1998, no. 97, fr. a-b, 6, 13, fr. c, 2), 9.3873.5; *AE* 1904.65.3; 1969/70.618.3.

⁶⁰ Suolahti 1972, 210.

⁶¹ Platnauer 1918, 57 fn. 4.

for the Senate's sake, of course. What emerges is a long-lasting political tendency throughout the Principate, pivoting on the well-balanced relationship between the Senate and the emperor – the key-issue of imperial Rome. This tendency had been especially promoted by Stoic philosophers and politicians, for whom the emperor Marcus Aurelius had been a *maître-à-penser*.⁶² During his principate, Marcus had missed no occasion to present his deference to the Senate, even in his own writings, and Dio does not fail to note such deference with admiration.⁶³

Nonetheless, Dio's endorsement of Pertinax does not imply mere approval.⁶⁴ There is also room for some critical assessment. This criticism orbits around the hope of a senator for a new deal which is completely frustrated by subsequent events. When elaborating the rapid end of Pertinax, killed by the praetorians on March 28, 193, Dio explicitly tells us of the emperor's ambitious plans to restore the state, and of their unsurprising failure:

Cass. Dio 74.10.3 = Xiph. 287.29-288.3 οὕτω μὲν ὁ Περτίναξ ἐπιχειρήσας ἐν ὀλίγῳ πάντα ἀνακαλέσασθαι ἐτελεύτησεν, οὐδὲ ἔγνω, καίπερ ἐμπειρότατος πραγμάτων ὢν, ὅτι ἀδύνατόν ἐστιν ἀθρόα τινὰ ἀσφαλῶς ἐπανορθοῦσθαι, ἀλλ' εἴπερ τι ἄλλο, καὶ πολιτικὴ κατάστασις καὶ χρόνου καὶ σοφίας χρῆζει.

Thus did Pertinax, who undertook to restore everything in a moment, come to his end. He failed to comprehend, though a man of wide practical experience, that one cannot with safety reform everything at once, and that the restoration of a state, in particular, requires both time and wisdom.⁶⁵

The phrase “restoration of a state” is rendered in Greek as πολιτικὴ κατάστασις. This is a noteworthy expression. Κατάστασις appears in the Greek version of Augustus' *Res Gestae* to define the title of

⁶² For the basics: Brunt 2013.

⁶³ A useful selection: M. Aur. *Med.* 2.1, 3.5, 4.12, 4.31, 5.30, 5.35-6, 6.7, 6.30, 6.44, 7.5, 7.31, 7.54, 8.12, 10.6, 10.8, 11.4, 11.18, 12.20. See Cass. Dio 72[71].33.2 = Xiph. 266.29-31 ‘ἡμεῖς γάρ’ ἔφη πρὸς τὴν βουλὴν λέγων ‘οὕτως οὐδὲν ἴδιον ἔχομεν ὥστε καὶ ἐν τῇ ὑμετέρᾳ οἰκίᾳ οἰκοῦμεν’ (‘As for us’, he [*scil.* Marcus Aurelius] said, in addressing the senate, ‘we are so far from possessing anything of our own that even the house in which we live is yours’). See also Cass. Dio 72[71].35.1 = Xiph. 267.27-32.

⁶⁴ Cf. Cass. Dio 74[73].8.5 = Xiph. 287.3-4 μὴ γένοιτο [...] μηδὲνα βουλευτὴν ἐμοῦ ἄρχοντος μηδὲ δικαίως θανατωθῆναι (Heaven forbid that any senator should be put to death while I am ruler, even for just cause).

⁶⁵ Cf. HA Pert. 12.8: *expectans urbis natalem ... eum diem rerum principium uolebat esse*; 14.6: *populus ... uidebat omnia per eum antiqua posse restitui*.

the *triumviri rei publicae constituendae*.⁶⁶ In its turn, the adjective πολιτική stems from πολίτης and πολιτεία (Latin *ciuitas*, to be intended as synonym of *res publica*).⁶⁷ It reminds us once more of the Latin word *ciuilis* implied by Dio's description of Pertinax as δημοτικός, as we have already seen. Therefore, the meaning of Dio's phrase must not be too distant from that found in the *Res Gestae*: in a state of emergency, Pertinax aimed to safeguard the *res publica* after the political disaster caused by Commodus. That is to say, a πολιτική κατάσταση was needed.

Nonetheless, when Didius Julianus came to power (March 28, 193), he was supported by the Praetorian Guard, and there was nothing for the Senate to do but to accept him as emperor. Ironically, the dream of a senatorial Principate was broken by a member of the Senate, as Didius was indeed – and a wealthy one, a virtue that the praetorians particularly appreciated. Renewed civil war was to follow his short reign (ended on June 1, 193).⁶⁸

3 Conclusion: Stoicism in Action

The parallel analysis of Dio's text offered above has intended to show the way in which Dio's attention to the transition from Caligula to Claudius between January 24 and 25, 41 may have drawn inspiration from his own personal experience of the events which occurred between December 31, 192 and January 1, 193. The fall of Caligula had something to tell Dio as well as his distinguished readers, both of which will have witnessed the civil war of 193 and the difficulties of the Severan age. The debate surrounding whether to δημοκρατεῖσθαι or μοναρχεῖσθαι, that animated the senatorial assembly in 41, had been the very first attempt to reset the Roman state and its components on different grounds. Claudius tried to restart the *res publica* by acknowledging the Senate's pivotal role in the government of the state, a role to be played alongside the Augustan family.

No doubt in Dio's time it was striking in many ways that the possibility to restore the old Republic could be still seriously and openly taken into consideration by sectors of the Senate. Dio does not fail to put the accent on that crucial question – δημοκρατεῖσθαι or μοναρχεῖσθαι? With the assassination of Commodus, the republican option was certainly not on the table. Instead, the point was rather *how* the republican essence of the Senate could really cope with the inescapably monarchical essence of the Principate. The crisis be-

⁶⁶ *RGDA* 1.4, and cf. Sherk 1969, 57.

⁶⁷ Freyburger-Galland 1997, 44-5.

⁶⁸ For Didius' chronology see Kienast; Eck, Heil 2017, 147.

tween the *res publica* and its form of government was temporarily resolved with the accession of a senatorial *princeps*. Pertinax was not only an old and distinguished senator. He was more than a new Nerva. He was a special kind of senator, indeed, since when he took power he was the urban prefect in office. He represented the civic counterpart to all the prevarications of the Praetorian Guard. After all, he was the only man from the Senate who could legitimately have a military force at his disposal in Rome. Although it did not suffice, as proved by the events that followed, it did count at that specific point when the Senate had just eliminated a tyrant.

In a rather different manner to Pertinax, in 41 Claudius had become emperor first and foremost at the wish and behest of the praetorians. The republican option outlined during the senatorial debate after the killing of Caligula had been an extreme and ultimately impotent counterpart to that wish. That was more ideology than politics. In 193 the Senate ideologically and politically acted on its own, chose the most suitable of its members for the imperial office, and hoped to hold the reins of the *res publica* from a prominent position. It was a failure. Nonetheless, it was a philosophically justified attempt. It was, I believe, a briefly effective Stoic action, with a basic Ciceronian texture, as the murder of Caligula itself had probably been.

As anticipated (§ 1), Caligula's debut had been somewhat in line with the theoretical precepts of Cicero's *De republica*. But in Cicero's view, given its own essence, a pure monarchy could easily decline into tyranny, and the solution he envisaged was indeed the cooperation between an excellent man chosen by the Senate and the Senate itself – which by no means must be taken as a prospect of monarchic settlement, nor was the façade of Augustus' design of the Principate meant to suggest it. That of Cicero was however a pragmatic view of the ideal statesman, supported by the awareness that a leading man under specific conditions – as were those of the late Republic – could serve the Roman state more effectively. We may indeed assume with Zarecki (2014, 4) that Cicero's general ideal of statesman in the *De republica* was “a practical template for public life in an increasingly violent and fractured political community”, as Rome was in the 50s BCE. As Zarecki maintains (2014, 5), it entails “a greater sympathy towards individual power than is generally allowed” – a view upon which Brunt (1988, 507) and Narducci (2009, 340) would probably agree. Nevertheless, this was also a view that many adherents to Stoicism would have shared at the time of Cicero, as well as beyond.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ An early assessment of Cicero's *optimus ciuis/princeps* is given by Lepore 1954; cf. Brunt 1988, 508; Narducci 2009, 342-5; Zalecki 2014, 80-91. Nonetheless, I am aware that to assume that Cicero *directly* influenced Augustus' political design can be disputed. The nature of Cicero's statesman is however unclear to many, but it is clear that there is a strongly practical side in it, related to individual wisdom, which has distinc-

Of course, this does not mean that there had ever been any structured Stoic political programme, nor that Stoics preferred a state governed as a monarchy rather than as a republic.⁷⁰ They preferred, and indeed strived for, a state governed under the guidance of a rigorously conscious leadership – rigorous and conscious especially for the supreme sake of the commonwealth.⁷¹ There is a patent ambiguity in this, as in any unstructured programme or thought or tendency. Nevertheless, we may quite safely maintain that Stoic philosophers and politicians did not think or act against monarchy. Instead, they did think or act against tyranny, and in this respect there was certainly a Stoic influence among sectors of the Senate under the Principate, as well as there had been in the late Republic. Examples from Cato the Younger to Thrasea Paetus to Helvidius Priscus are all too well known.⁷² Marcus Aurelius, whose education depended upon Stoic masters to a decisive measure, represented by far the most distinguished political product of that influence. I should therefore prefer to go farther than Sandbach's generic contention that "Stoicism must have had some undefinable general influence that favoured conscientious administration for the benefit of the ordinary man and a humanitarianism that resulted in a little legislation and some charitable foundations" (1975, 148).

From the Stoic point of view, what mattered under the Principate was the Senate's role in relation to the emperor, which is the key factor regulating the relationship between the Senate and the *optimus ciuis* in Cicero's *De republica*. This parallel seems to me essential irrespective of whether or not the *De republica* anticipated, directly or indirectly, elements of the Augustan arrangement of the Roman state. Cicero was not himself a Stoic. But it is worth noting that through a Stoic lens he seems to explore questions of political thought such as the limits of autocracy, with a special attention to the risk of autocracy turning into absolutism.⁷³ This he would directly experience after finishing the *De republica*, with the outbreak of

tively Stoic – rather than Platonic, as one may expect given that Platos' *Republic* was Cicero's model for *De republica* – traits: see Ferrary 1995, 54; Powell 2012, 15, 31; Brunt 2013, 237-8, 240, and cf. Nicgorski 2012, 250. After all, Cicero's education was partly Stoic, as was partly Platonic, as was partly Aristotelian etc. He was eclectic, and what cannot be disputed is that Stoicism played an important role in shaping his (political as well as moral) thought: see Cic. *Div.* 2.3; Sandbach 1975, 142; Ferrary 1988, 363-81; Nicgorski 2012, 246-7, 252, 254, 270, 272, 274, 277. On the Stoic theoretical approach to absolute autocracy see Brunt 2013, 286-91. More on Cicero's *De republica* in Stroh 2008, 58-64, and especially Zarecki 2014.

⁷⁰ Sandbach 1975, 145, 147; Brunt 2013, 304.

⁷¹ Cf. Michel 1969, 47.

⁷² Sandbach 1975, 142-6; Brunt 2013, 310-28. On Thrasea Paetus in particular, as a Stoic and as an influent senator-model, see Brunt 2013, 297-301, 303-4, 316-22.

⁷³ Narducci 2009, 391.

civil war between Pompey and Caesar, and subsequently with Caesar sole ruler in Rome. And indeed his later *De officiis* (published 44 BCE) shares many views of the *De republica*, with a more recognisable Stoic allure.⁷⁴

So it is time to conclude with Dio's place in this discourse about absolute autocracy. We must start from his approach to Cicero. If it is known that under the Principate there was a widespread interest in Cicero among Greek authors, Gowing and Montecalvo have argued that this is particularly evident in the case of Dio.⁷⁵ In this respect, despite Dio's somewhat ambivalent opinion on Cicero – notably in the light of the famous dialogue between Cicero and Philiscus (Cass. Dio 38.18-29)⁷⁶ –, the ambivalence must not be taken at all as a negative assessment in itself.⁷⁷ Cicero and his works seem indeed to be quite extensively present in the *Roman History*, especially in the republican books.⁷⁸ Furthermore, Dio's ambivalence leaves room to a significant appreciation of Cicero's struggle for the sake of the *res publica*, especially when he operated as consul.⁷⁹

If we then focus on Dio's narration of the history of the Principate, and take into account his treatment of the transition situations I discussed in this chapter, we easily find that elements of Dio's discourse align with elements of Cicero's discourse – the more so, if we look at the *De republica*. Of course, this may just depend on a common ground pertaining to the political discourse about autocracy, which embraced a long span from Cicero to Dio – and most likely a lot of lost literature in between. Nonetheless, I tried to show that the attention Dio pays in the imperial books of the *Roman History* to absolutism in relation to 'senatorialism', which seems to me one of the most distinguished features of his historiographical effort, shares that Ciceronian ground. Contrary to Zarecki, thus, I would argue that the Ciceronian ideal of *optimus ciuis/princeps* did not fail to exist "since the *res publica*, the *sine qua non* of the *rector*-ideal, had ceased to exist" (2014, 162). It continued to exist, and Dio's work may prove that it did.

After all, Dio could rely on the political model of Marcus Aurelius, the Stoic and *ciuilis princeps*, and ideal(ized) monarch under the Sev-

⁷⁴ Zarecki 2014, 94-104 on Pompey and Caesar, 105-31 on Caesar alone, 142-3 on *De officiis* where a list of Stoic virtues (1.12), Zarecki maintains, "would be equally at home in *De Re Publica*".

⁷⁵ See Gowing 1998; Montecalvo 2014.

⁷⁶ On which see Burden-Strevens 2020, 53-60.

⁷⁷ On the dialogue between Cicero and Philiscus see Montecalvo 2014, 231-82.

⁷⁸ See Montecalvo 2014, 8-18 and *passim*.

⁷⁹ Montecalvo 2014, 360, but I cannot agree when she argues that "la parabola politica da lui [i.e. Cicero] compiuta rappresentava, agli occhi dello storico severiano [i.e. Dio], la decadenza della *res publica*" (361).

erans, whose legacy could not be stained by the misfortune of a degenerate son.⁸⁰ As a senator, Dio watched the events of 192/193 with his hopes still intact. Later on, as an historian, he wrote about those events without concealing his disillusionment, and as said Xiphili-nus' epitome could hardly have changed the substance. Dio as senator knew that the Senate he himself belonged to had a responsibility in the despotic degeneration of monarchy; as historian he does not fail to criticize the assembly whenever needed especially in the contemporary books of his work.⁸¹ The principle of a balanced government of the Roman state during the Principate, strongly promoted by Stoic politicians, had left too many victims in its wake. Pertinax was not just one more of those politicians; he was the most illustrious at the time of the senator-historian. As *princeps (senatus)*, Pertinax tried to fully embody the ideal of a senatorial Principate. Once this ideal had been established, though only temporarily and defectively, the question of whether to δημοκρατεῖσθαι or μοναρχεῖσθαι was overcome by a spectacular *synkrisis*: δημοκρατεῖσθαι and μοναρχεῖσθαι.

List of Abbreviations

AE = *L'Année Épigraphique*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1888-
CIL = *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*. Berlin: Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1863-
ILS = Dessau, H. (1892-1916). *Inscriptiones Latinae selectae*. Berlin: Weidmann.
LSJ = Liddell, H.G.; Scott, R.; Jones, S. (1996). *A Greek-English Lexicon. With a Revised Supplement*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
OLD = *Oxford Latin Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
RIC = *Roman Imperial Coinage*. London: Spink, 1923-
Samra = Bauzou, T. et al. (1998). *Fouilles de Khirbet Es-Samra en Jordanie*. Turnhout: Brepols.

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⁸⁰ On Marcus Aurelius as a model, cf. Hadot 1998, cxlii, cxlv. On Stoic influence on Dio's imperial books see Noe in this volume.

⁸¹ Cf. Lindholmer and Scott in this volume.

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Cassius Dio and the Principate

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The ‘Age of Iron and Rust’ in Cassius Dio’s *Roman History*: Influences from Stoic Philosophy

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Abstract This paper discusses the impact of Stoic philosophy on Cassius Dio’s imperial books of his *Roman History*. It is demonstrated how fundamental Stoic ideas influenced Dio’s constitutional discussions and the role of the emperor as in the Agrippa-Maecenas debate in book 52, and how Dio evaluated political environments as well as political developments in the Empire with inspirations from Stoic logic. Moreover, this paper argues that the iron age in his contemporary narrative from the emperor Commodus to Caracalla is also fundamentally an iron age on the basis of Stoic values.

Keywords Stoicism. Virtue. Ideal emperor. Political structure. Iron age.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Stoicism as Political Ideology. – 3 The Wise Man and the Ideal Politician. – 4 The ‘Age of Iron & Rust’. – 5 The Strengthening of the Soul. – 6 Final Remarks.




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1 Introduction

Cassius Dio was a senator during a period of great changes in the Roman Empire. Power was centralized, and the traditional senatorial elite had long been put on the side lines.¹ He himself described the period as a change from the 'golden age' of Marcus Aurelius to the 'iron age' of Commodus that was followed by a deeply problematic Severan Dynasty.² From what perspective did Dio perceive the political system of which he was very much part? In this article I propose a new dimension to the reading of Dio's *History*. To get a better understanding of Dio's project, we need to develop a more detailed knowledge of the underlying philosophical ideas that direct his narrative. This article will be primarily concerned with Dio's contemporary narrative, but will also include perspectives from other parts of his *History* where appropriate. The main purpose of this article is to demonstrate that Dio's *History* was written with inspiration from Stoic philosophy that ultimately influenced his explanations of historical developments and his evaluation of historical characters. This will provide us with important information on how to understand Dio's mind, how he evaluated political issues, and what he saw as the reasons members of the elite acted in the way they did.

Since elements of Stoic philosophy were so prevalent among Rome's intellectual elite by the 3rd century CE, it is important to interrogate their possible impact on Dio's narrative. However, we cannot expect Dio to write in the style of Seneca in his essays or in the style of Marcus Aurelius in his diary. Dio was an historian, and this article presents an analysis of parts of his *History* that can be useful not only to understand Dio's work in its own right but also to understand how we can trace elements of Stoic philosophy in historiography, and how Stoic ideas could be used to discuss politics, politicians, and the course of history.

Some parts of this analysis could equally be evidence of a Platonic inspiration: some considerable overlaps may quite easily be found between these two leading ancient philosophies. Surely Dio could have been inspired by different philosophical schools, and the point is that we can learn a lot about the political elite of the 3rd century by trying to understand the philosophical basis of their political and historical arguments. This article does not present a full-scale argument of Dio's philosophy. It presents an analysis of some fundamental Stoic ideas which are traceable in his monumental work.

Although the majority of Dio's contemporary narrative survives in the epitomes of the Byzantine monk Xiphilinus, this fact does not

¹ Noe 2019, 13 ff.

² Cass. Dio 72[71].36.4.

militerate against the analysis offered in the present article. Passages where we can compare Dio with Xiphilinus are quite close to each other. Besides this, Xiphilinus has a tendency to point out when he deviates from Dio's text.³ Moreover, it is generally acknowledged that Xiphilinus' method seems to have been either to copy passages in Dio or to make summaries where he simplified the narrative and/or omitted passages that he thought unimportant, such as speeches.⁴ Of course, this makes a complete analysis of Dio's narrative structure, his way of using speeches to discuss political and/or moral questions, and other such themes impossible, because these "unimportant" parts have simply not survived. But the basic point here is that the epitomes of Xiphilinus are fundamentally still Dio, albeit in an abbreviated form. We can, with reasonable safety, assume that the world-view and the narrative logic that are present in the books on the Severan period represent the thoughts of Dio, not of Xiphilinus.

Earlier scholarship on Dio focused on style, language, and structure.⁵ The modern approach is rather different. Recently, many studies have approached Dio's *History* from a narratological perspective. This interest is also seen in relation to Dio's narrative of his own time (from the later part of Commodus to the reign of Alexander Severus). However, it has proven difficult to break some established paradigms. Seeing Dio as part of the traditional "senatorial tradition", where the ideals of the *civilis princeps* are the basic perspective to the narratives of the emperors, has been a dominant way of approaching his view of the Principate.⁶ It has been noticed by Adler (2012) that Dio ideally believed that the emperor ought to be a wise man, although his ideal often approaches the utopian. Dio has, according to Adler, quite a pessimistic view on the leaders of state and on human nature in general.⁷ Hence, Adler does not analyse how Dio sees the idea of

³ Xiphilinus mentions his lack of Dio as a source for the narrative about Antoninus Pius, see Cass. Dio 70.1.1; for an example of his deviation from Dio's analysis, see 72.9-10, and for the omission of details mentioned by Dio, see 78.6.1.

⁴ On the ordering of the work, see Barmann 1971, 59. On Xiphilinus' methods, see Millar 1964, 195-203; Barmann 1971, 60; Brunt 1980, 489-90; Mallan 2013, 610-19; 630-44.

⁵ See Andersen 1938, 49-64; Gabba 1959, 376-8; Fadinger 1969, 27-8; 334-6; Manuwald 1979, 6-12; 21-6; 275. Even Millar 1964, who claimed that he would make the first attempt to read Dio as a literary work, ended up concluding that Dio presented no larger interpretations (45) and had no underlying or governing view on history (76-7).

⁶ This view is to some degree present in Syme 1939, 313-30. For a more explicit placement of Dio within the *civilis princeps*-tradition, see De Blois 1994, 166-71, who explains these ideals as a blend between the Augustan "ideology" and traditional Greek ideals of the good ruler. See Adler 2012, 506-13 for a discussion of how Dio's book 52 as a whole advocates for the important blend between democracy and monarchy, which is the system favoured by the *civilis princeps*. For a general outline on the ideals of the *civilis princeps*, see Wallace-Hadrill 1982, 32 ff.

⁷ Adler 2012, 487-99.

the wise man in practice (or what happens when the emperor is not wise). The traditional view on Dio as a simple proponent of the *civilis princeps* has generated marked attention on the role of the senatorial elite in his political philosophy.⁸

Scholarship on Dio's own time has also begun to focus on narrative style and structure. Madsen (2016) argues that Dio was especially critical of family dynasties because such a system could not ensure that the best man be in power. Thus, to Dio the nomination or appointment of the ideal candidate by (and preferably from) the Senate presented the better system. Hence, the period of the adoptive emperors from Nerva to Marcus Aurelius is presented as a golden age, in which the political system is well-functioning with a series of competent emperors succeeding each other and where we find good collaboration between the emperor (who still has absolute power to ensure stability) and the Senate.⁹ Dio is aware of the fact that the idea of a more powerful Senate was to some degree an illusion, but his point is that this system would be more honourable for the elite and would better ensure the stability of the system through time. Hence, one of the primary problems with Severus was that he gave sole power to his two incompetent sons.¹⁰ Rantala (2016) also discusses Dio's contemporary narrative from a literary perspective. His main points are that Dio uses well-known formulas in order to create a simple story in which Severus is portrayed as a tyrant through his lack of *clementia*, through his use of the army as his power base, and through his idealization of Sulla.¹¹

Although these studies have been important for establishing Dio's political ideals and for understanding how larger messages extend across his many books, much remains to be said. No attempt has yet been made to analyse Dio's underlying philosophical views in their entirety, although it has been recognised that Dio's political thought is inspired by Stoicism. Comments on Dio's relationship with Stoicism have tended to be casual and placed within broader discussions of Dio's style, general political views, or sources of inspiration.¹² In

⁸ Millar 1964, 122-3; Hekster 2002, 4-5.

⁹ Madsen 2016, 146-53.

¹⁰ Madsen 2016, 154-8.

¹¹ Rantala 2016, 165-72.

¹² See e.g. Gangloff (2018, 350) who identifies Stoic and Platonic logic in book 52, where Maecenas talks about the deification of emperors: Cass. Dio 52.35.5 Ἀρετὴ μὲν γὰρ ἰσοθέους πολλοὺς ποιεῖ, χειροτονητὸς δ' οὐδεὶς πώποτε θεὸς ἐγένετο. See Fishwick 1990, 167-70 for a discussion of possible sources of inspiration from other authors for the whole 52.35 in Dio. However, his basic message is that in the speech of Maecenas, Dio draws heavily from familiar themes on traditional advice for supreme rulers (275). On this point he is closer to Millar 1964, who mostly presents anecdotal points about Dio's political views: Dio's political and philosophical ideas were standardized and

this article I aim at a deeper investigation on Dio's inspiration from Stoicism.

2 Stoicism as Political Ideology

In order to understand how Dio constructs his narratives upon a Stoic base, we should start by considering some key aspects of Stoic philosophy against which we can measure Dio's political thought. In order to clarify the components of Stoicism as a political ideology or as a philosophy that can be traced in a political and historical narrative, the Stoic conception of holistic interconnectivity is a good point of departure. There was a natural order, embracing the entire universe in its totality. The Stoics called it Nature, and the idea was to live in accordance with the laws of this universal order. With this holistic view of the interrelation of everything came the idea that each person had a specific role to play in society. The important thing here is that each person had his role and responsibilities according to his social, economic, and political status. So, the idea was that one was supposed to fulfil the role that had been given. If one happened to be a military general, how would he fulfil this role to the maximum societal benefit? If one happened to be emperor, how should he manage this responsibility in accordance with Nature?¹³

The Stoics thought man to be rational and capable of being educated to understand the ways of Nature. Therefore, they did not approve of harsh punishments as they perceived criminals as merely ignorant of Nature's laws. Rather, these men should be educated. Moreover, the Stoics thought that rulers had an obligation to treat subjects humanely.¹⁴

The education of a Stoic aimed to comprehend the order of Nature (and thereby to understand one's own place in the universe), and to create an impenetrable mind, so making one capable of always taking the right decision based on reason. Thus, courage and a stern mo-

more or less generalities about human nature. Millar does not engage in any coherent discussion of Dio's underlying philosophical views (72 ff). But he argues that Augustus' dialogue with Livia on the conspiracy of Cn. Cornelius Cinna Magnus (Cass. Dio 55.14-22) seems to be particularly inspired by Seneca's *De Clementia*, the main points being in line with Stoic ideas about mildness and clemency (78-9); on this point, see also Gangloff 2018, 383.

¹³ On the idea of a universal natural order, see e.g. Shaw 1985, 31-4. On the specific idea of everything's place in the universe as a whole, see Engberg-Pedersen 2017, 225-34; See also e.g. M. Aur. *Med.* 3.11; 4.40. On the specific role each individual is given see Shaw 1985, 34-37. He describes it as 'role play', and in this idea he sees a great deal of deliberate social differentiation.

¹⁴ Shaw 1985, 37-43.

ality were normal characteristics of the good man of strong mind.¹⁵ Focus on morality and virtue was not exclusive to Stoics, but their strong emphasis on education, the fundamental other-relatedness of one's societal duties, and the ideal of the impenetrable mind, are specific and important Stoic ideas.

A final point to be mentioned is the Stoic's view on political organisation. They were not opponents of monarchy, nor were they against political authority in general. On the contrary, Stoics tended to see society as the natural arrangement of human beings and the state as nature's agent in providing all the necessities of a good life. However, they can be seen as opponents of the Aristotelian *polis*-community. The boundaries of the *polis* were not fitting to the Stoic idea of humans being 'inhabitants of the world' and so the Hellenistic kingdoms or the Roman Empire were actually more in line with their ideas of universal laws and universal citizenship.¹⁶

3 The Wise Man and the Ideal Politician

First, we need to embrace the concept of the Stoic wise man. This concept is critical to grasp in order to perceive the way in which Dio's judgement of emperors goes beyond the basic ideas of the *civilis princeps*. For this discussion we must go back to the first emperor, Augustus, and take a look at the only place where Dio really dwells on the ideological and philosophical foundations of the Principate: book 52. Here we also get the chance to read Dio's own words instead of the epitomes of Xiphilinus. Even though book 52 is primarily a discussion of constitutions and political arrangements, it does also address more philosophical topics. This discussion will be divided into two parts: 1) the character of the ideal politician, and 2) the role of the emperor in the Roman Empire.

To exemplify the Stoic ideal of the statesman, we may begin with the description of Cato the Younger in Lucan's *Pharsalia*, who is praised throughout the work and characterized as a true Stoic politician:¹⁷

Lucan, *Phars.* 2.388-91
Urbi pater est, Urbique maritus:
Iustitiae cultor, rigidi servator honesti:

¹⁵ On the special role given to wisdom as the sole true virtue, see Brunt 1975, 11; Engberg-Pedersen 2017, 115-24. For a comment on courage and stern morality, see Gangloff 2018, 330.

¹⁶ Shaw 1985, 28-30, 45-54. M. Aur. regularly expresses the idea of the state as a meaningful and natural arrangement for humans, see e.g. 4.3; 5.1; 5.16.

¹⁷ For a general introduction to Stoicism in *Pharsalia* see Colish 1985, 252-74.

*In commune bonus: nullosque Catonis in actus
Subrepsit partemque tulit sibi nata voluptas.*

For Rome, he was father and husband, justice's keeper,
Strict morality's champion, always upholding
The common good. And into none of Cato's deeds
Did there creep even a hint of selfish pleasure.¹⁸

Especially in the first part of Maecenas' monologue there are several examples that corresponds to this outline. Maecenas begins by addressing Octavian's duties:

Cass. Dio 52.14.1 ὥστε εἴ τι κήδη τῆς πατρίδος, ὑπὲρ ἧς τοσούτους πολέμους πεπολέμηκας, ὑπὲρ ἧς καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ἡδέως ἂν ἐπιδοίης, μεταρρύθμισον αὐτὴν καὶ κατακόσμησον πρὸς τὸ σωφρονέστερον.

Hence, if you feel any concern at all for your country, for which you have fought so many wars and would so gladly give even your life, reorganize it yourself and regulate it in the direction of greater moderation.¹⁹

In this way Dio begins the speech of Maecenas with a reminder that Octavian fought the civil wars for the sake of the state. Here we see the Stoic idea that serving the state is a central part of a man's *virtus*. Furthermore, morality and moderation come into play here, which is also the case a little later:

Cass. Dio 52.34.1 Πάνθ' ὅσα τοὺς ἀρχομένους καὶ φρονεῖν καὶ πράττειν βούλει, καὶ λέγε καὶ ποίει. οὕτω γὰρ ἂν μᾶλλον παιδεύσεις αὐτοὺς ἢ ταῖς ἐκ τῶν νόμων τιμωρίαις δειματώσεις.

Whatever you wish your subjects to think and do, this you should always say and do yourself. In this way you will be educating them, rather than intimidating them through the punishments prescribed by the laws.

In the quote from *Pharsalia* we also see the emperor as a guardian of the Roman state. We get a clear sense of duty. The Stoics embraced the society as the entity towards which everything is directed. They discarded the idea that *gloria* was an object of one's political actions, as had been the case in the traditional Republican tradition. A quote from Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* represents their ideas:

¹⁸ Translation: Walters 2015.

¹⁹ Translations of Dio follow those of Cary 1914-1927 with some adjustments of my own.

Cic. *Rep.* 6.16 *Iustitiam cole et pietatem, quae cum magna in parentibus et propinquis tum in patria maxima est; ea vita via est in caelum et in hunc coetum eorum, qui iam vixerunt et corpore laxati illum incolunt locum.*

Love justice and duty, which are indeed strictly due to parents and kinsmen, but most of all to the fatherland. Such a life is the road to the skies, to that gathering of those who have completed their earthly lives and been relieved of the body.²⁰

Hence, all one's actions as a politician should be judged according to whether one does something for the benefit of the state. Accordingly, to be emperor was a task only to be undertaken because one was suited to it, and did it as a duty rather than a source of personal gain. In a Stoic political discourse, we would expect to find a focus which is broadly societal in nature. Here, the senatorial ideal of a *civilis princeps* is too narrow. This sort of societal discourse is something we expect to find in Dio if he is in fact inspired by Stoic philosophy.

In regard to the emperor this logic also applies. The Stoics, as well as the Platonics, saw the mind as divided into three parts, where rationality is seen as the one that needs to control the larger part of the soul: lust. According to the Stoics, lust is really a destructive force. It is not in the interest of the organism to succumb to lustful actions. In Stoic philosophy this idea can be used to explain mechanisms within the state (just as Plato does in *The Republic*).²¹ This fits well with the fact the Stoics had an idea of one *natural governing force*. Seneca describes it in these words:

Sen. *Clem.* 1.4 *Ille est enim vinculum, per quod res publica cohaeret, ille spiritus vitalis, quem haec tot milia trahunt nihil ipsa per se futura nisi onus et praeda, si mens illa imperii subtrahatur.*

For he is the bond by which the commonwealth is united, the breath of life which these many thousands draw, who in their own strength would be only a burden to themselves and the prey of others if the great mind of the empire should be withdrawn.

Sen. *Clem.* 1.5 *Nam si [...] tu animus rei publicae tuae es, illa corpus tuum...*

²⁰ Translation: Keyes 1928.

²¹ Engberg-Pedersen 2017, 106.

For if [...] you [*scil.* Nero] are the soul of the state and the state your body...²²

This is an organic view on the state, and this governs the general idea of the distinct *statio* of each individual; the specific role everyone needs to play in society in order to make the state function as an entity. These roles are of course given according to status, wealth, health, and talents.

So, if Dio is presenting a generally Stoic view on the emperor we would expect him to comment on exactly these ideas. He would not simply talk about the emperor as a *civilis princeps* who behaves humbly in public and treats the senators well. We would also expect him to emphasise that the emperor is a natural driving force and that his actions directly influence the whole of society. Moreover, we would expect some form of concrete examples of what the special *statio* of an emperor is.

In the first part of his speech, Maecenas encourages Octavian to embrace the full task of reforming society. Following this paragraph, a central theme is that Octavian should ensure to choose all important advisors himself, with whom he should take all decisions:

Cass. Dio 52.14.3 τὴν διοίκησιν τῶν κοινῶν ἑαυτῷ τε καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις τοῖς ἀρίστοις προσθεῖναι, ἵνα βουλευώσι μὲν οἱ φρονιμώτατοι, ἄρχωσι δὲ οἱ στρατηγικώτατοι, στρατεύονται δὲ καὶ μισθοφορῶσιν οἱ τε ἰσχυρότατοι καὶ οἱ πενέστατοι.

Place the management of public affairs in the hands of yourself and the other best citizens, to the end that the business of deliberation may be performed by the most prudent and that of ruling by those best fitted for command, while the work of serving in the army for pay is left to those who are strongest physically and most needy.

This passage is not only about the emperor's role in the state; it also expresses a logic that specific groups of the people have their right place doing specific tasks for the society – hence Octavian shall take the monarchical power because *he is the best suited* for that specific role. This logic continues in 52.15, where Maecenas explains that the introduction of a monarchy will be for the benefit of the state, the argument being that one cannot expect the people to be able to make up its mind about public affairs. So, if the state shall function properly, it must be the emperor and his advisors who take all decisions and appoint magistrates.²³ Only in this way can terrible political strife be avoided. In the rest of chapter 15 Dio presents the oth-

²² Translation: Basore 1928.

²³ Cass. Dio 52.15.1-4.

er members of the elite (i.e. primarily senators) as insensible. These men have a lust for power and to fulfil this lust they spare no effort:

Cass. Dio 52.15.5 ταῦτα γὰρ πᾶσα μὲν δημοκρατία ἔχει: οἱ γὰρ δυνατότεροι, τῶν τε πρωτείων ὀρεγόμενοι καὶ τοὺς ἀσθενεστέρους μισθούμενοι, πάντα ἄνω καὶ κάτω φύρουσι.

For these are the evils found in every democracy, – the more powerful men, namely, in reaching out after the primacy and hiring the weaker, turn everything upside down.

Dio's thinking here leans heavily towards both Platonic and Stoic philosophy. This idea is quite clearly working here in Dio's presentation of the relationship between the emperor and the rest of the elite: At the top we have a rational and wise emperor, the personified reason of the state, who rules because he is the only one competent enough to do so. The elite is a sort of representation of the lustful (and therefore anti-Stoic) part of the soul, and this part needs to be controlled to avoid damage to the community. In this way, Octavian is a prerequisite for a well-functioning society.²⁴

What we have here is an historian with quite a sceptical view on the elite as a collective entity. Convinced that they ruin everything, Dio does not wish them to hold too much power. Later in this article we will see some concrete examples of this criticism of the Roman senatorial class.

4 The 'Age of Iron & Rust'

We now turn to Dio's contemporary narrative with the aim of understanding how Dio perceived the state of affairs of his own time. This discussion takes as its point of departure the dramatic opening passage he uses to stage the new regime:

Cass. Dio 72[71].36.4 περὶ οὗ ἤδη ρητέον, ἀπὸ χρυσοῦς τε βασιλείας ἐς σιδηρᾶν καὶ κατιωμένην τῶν τε πραγμάτων τοῖς τότε Ῥωμαίοις καὶ ἡμῖν νῦν καταπεσοῦσης τῆς ἱστορίας.

About this we must state that the history has fallen from a kingdom of gold to one of rusty iron – both for the Romans back then and for us now.²⁵

²⁴ Cass. Dio 52.18.4.

²⁵ This translation is different from Cary's as I propose another interpretation (see footnote 31).

And so, the reign of Commodus is introduced. Dio uses this metaphor to characterize the importance of the change from the ideal Stoic emperor Marcus Aurelius to his son Commodus. Apparently, this marked the beginning of a drastic decline for the Roman state. Dio does not, however, explain this statement explicitly. What is it that becomes an era of iron and rust?

The metaphorical fall from an age of gold to one of iron is of course traceable back to Hesiod, and in poetry we also find it in the Augustan poet Ovid. Both employ the metaphor to describe how the generations of humans would gradually decay – from a golden generation to one of silver, followed by one of bronze until we reach the iron age, a time characterized by immorality and distress.²⁶ Whereas Hesiod and Ovid see a gradual descent towards the worse, Dio uses καταπεσούσης to describe a decline which should be understood as a sudden fall – underlined in the fact that it goes directly from gold to iron. Moreover, Hesiod and Ovid present this metaphor as completely detached from concrete ideas of specific societies and constitutions, whereas Dio uses it to describe a specific change in government. Although Bertrand (2015) is certainly correct in stating that Dio is the only historian we know of who uses this metaphor,²⁷ it seems likely that he followed an established tradition that goes back at least to the Neronian age. In the tragedy *Octavia* (of unknown authorship), Seneca is given a monologue where he talks about Nero's regime as an Iron Age – whereas the emperor himself described his Principate as a new golden one, as reflected in panegyrics to Nero at that time.²⁸

Dio is, however, the only author known to have combined the Iron Age with rust.²⁹ He uses the participial form of κατιόομαι ("to become rusty") and in both Greek and Latin rust (Lat. *rubigo*) has a metaphorical undertone as a symbol of decay.³⁰ Hence, to combine iron with rust alludes to a state where everything further degenerates and decays as a result of insufficient care.

²⁶ Hes. *Op.* 106-201; Ov. *Met.* 89-150.

²⁷ Bertrand 2015, 165.

²⁸ In Seneca's monologue the civilized, human race is far from being a golden one. Rather, civilization means abuse of nature, wars, jealousy, and gluttony. Nero's age marks the nadir of these immoral and godless times (Pseudo-Seneca, *Octavia*, 381-435); Kragelund 2016, 215; 228, 310-27, discusses how, in *Octavia*, Nero's Principate is presented as an Iron Age. For notions about Nero's proclamation of a Golden Age, see Champlin 1998, 105-6. On the panegyrics, see Champlin 2003, 276ff.

²⁹ Also stated by Bertrand 2015, 165.

³⁰ In the *Discourses* of Epictetus (Arr. *Epict.* 4.6.14) ἀλλ' ὥς ὀπλάρια ἀποκείμενα κατίωται καὶ οὐδὲ περιαρμόσαι μοι δύναται. In the late Roman writer Prudentius (Prudent. *Psych.* 1.105-06) *nec iam contenta piatum condere vaginae gladium, ne tecta rubigo occupet ablutum scabrosa sorde nitorem*.

Interestingly, even though Dio's metaphor seems to be focused on politics he does in fact direct his metaphor towards the conditions of the common people. This political change did also affect τοῖς Ῥωμαίοις. This is not a thoroughly elitist perspective. Finally, it must be stressed that nowhere does Dio indicate the ending of this Iron Age. He actually tells us so explicitly, but this does not appear in Cary's translation. To be precise, τοῖς τότε Ῥωμαίοις καὶ ἡμῖν νῦν καταπεσοῦσης τῆς ἱστορίας should be translated as "the history fell for the Romans back then and for us now", νῦν being in direct opposition to τότε, hence "back then and now".³¹ This is the world we now turn to. It is like an organism that is rapidly decaying, and thereby affecting every living cell because its soul, the emperor, is not taking care of it.

It all started with Commodus. The lurid stories – many of them exaggerated – about Commodus' Principate are well known, but Dio offers one especially Stoic interpretation of the impact his (mis)rule had on the entire Roman people. Dio concludes the life of Pertinax as follows:

Cass. Dio 74.10.3 οὕτω μὲν ὁ Περτίναξ ἐπιχειρήσας ἐν ὀλίγῳ πάντα ἀνακαλέσασθαι ἐτελεύτησεν, οὐδὲ ἔγνων καίπερ ἐμπειρότατος πραγμάτων ὢν, ὅτι ἀδύνατόν ἐστιν ἀθρόα τινα ἀσφαλῶς ἐπανορθοῦσθαι, ἀλλ' εἴπερ τι ἄλλο, καὶ πολιτικὴ κατάστασις καὶ χρόνου καὶ σοφίας χρήζει.

Thus did Pertinax, who undertook to restore everything in a moment, come to his end. He failed to comprehend, though a man of wide practical experience, that one cannot with safety reform everything at once, and that the restoration of a state, in particular, requires both time and wisdom.

It was Pertinax who single-handedly had the task of restoring the state. Civil war was indeed the reason for this need of restoration in Dio's book 52, where Agrippa and Maecenas advised Octavian on the direction to follow after the victory in the civil wars. But Pertinax had been installed as emperor immediately after the murder of Commodus.³² There was in fact no other reason for this need of restoration than Commodus' politics.

This work of restoration was linked to several elements, some of them easy to solve: He rehabilitated people who were unjustly killed

³¹ Cary's translation: "for our history now descends from a kingdom of gold to one of iron and rust, as affairs did for the Romans of that day". The French translation of Gros goes: "pour nous aujourd'hui, comme les affaires pour les Romains de ce temps, l'histoire est tombée d'un règne d'or dans un règne de fer et de rouille" (Didot 1870).

³² Cass. Dio 74.1f; Hdn. 2.1f.

by Commodus, and he gave them a worthy funeral.³³ Moreover, the political culture within the elite immediately improved. Allegorically Dio tells us how the esteemed senator Pompeianus had kept away from Rome during the reign of Commodus, excusing himself on account of his blindness, but when Pertinax became emperor Pompeianus returned and recovered his sight.³⁴ Unfortunately, the lack of discipline of the soldiers was also one of these tasks, and here Pertinax was unsuccessful. Dio's analysis is that Commodus had given the soldiers so much privilege and luxury, and so much freedom to plunder, that they could in no way accustom themselves to the orderly and moderate life under Pertinax.³⁵

We are reminded of Seneca's image of the emperor as the soul of the state and the Stoics' idea of the rational part of the mind having to control the irrational elements. Here Dio shows us how this could look in a political system: if the irrational elements of the state (the citizens, soldiers etc.) are given free hands, they will get accustomed to all sorts of misbehaviour (because that is what irrational elements do). It is a destructive force, clearly shown here: A part of Commodus' heritage was an undisciplined and corrupted praetorian guard that made a full return to orderly conditions almost impossible. In this way, Pertinax is a tragic victim of the unhealthy state of affairs where the wrong people have for too long held too much power. Consequently, Pertinax immediately became unpopular amongst the praetorians when he proclaimed the beginning of more modest times. They stormed the palace and he was killed.³⁶

To Dio this period was characterized by a kind of reversed order, where the senators are governed by the authority of the soldiers and where good ideals must yield to violence and licentiousness. The same reversed order is still found during the reign of Caracalla. In Dio's *History*, the welfare of the soldiers is the direct goal of Caracalla's monarchical power:

Cass. Dio 78[77].3.1-2 ἐσελθὼν δὲ ἐς τὸ τεῖχος 'χαίρετε,' εἶπεν, 'ὦ ἄνδρες συστρατιῶται: καὶ γὰρ ἤδη ἔξεστί μοι εὐεργετεῖν ὑμᾶς.' καὶ πρὶν πάντα ἀκοῦσαι, ἐνέφραξέ σφωὶν τὰ στόματα τοσαύταις καὶ τηλικαύταις ὑποσχέσεσιν ὥστε μήτ' ἐννοῆσαι μήτε φθέγεσθαι τι αὐτοὺς εὐσεβεῖς δυνηθῆναι. 'εἷς' γὰρ ἔφησεν 'ἐξ ὑμῶν εἰμί, καὶ δι' ὑμᾶς μόνους ζῆν ἐθέλω, ἵν' ὑμῖν πολλὰ χαρίζωμαι: ὑμέτεροι γὰρ οἱ θησαυροὶ πάντες εἰσὶ'.

³³ Cass. Dio 74.5.3.

³⁴ Cass. Dio 74.3.2-3.

³⁵ Cass. Dio 74.1.2-3; 74.8.1.

³⁶ Cass. Dio 74.8-10.

On entering the camp he exclaimed: "Rejoice, fellow-soldiers, for now I am in a position to do you favours". And before they heard the whole story he had stopped their mouths with so many and so great promises that they could neither think of nor say anything to show proper respect for the dead. "I am one of you", he said, "and it is because of you alone that I care to live, in order that I may confer upon you many favours; for all the treasures are yours".

His father Septimius Severus' famous last words ("enrich the soldiers and scorn all other men") were certainly followed by Caracalla.³⁷ Here, Dio's narrative emphasises the soldiers as a group. He casts this fixation, like a shadow, over the rest of his narrative about Caracalla. Dio creates a world where Caracalla installed the soldiers as a governing organ within the state.³⁸ Dio delivers several examples of the emperor's squandering of money on the soldiers and their luxurious living.³⁹

But besides these stories there is also a central Stoic point: one must read the whole of Dio's *History* to be able to fully grasp it. There seems to be a kind of symbiotic relationship between bad emperors and the army. The soldiers do not primarily appear in their proper role as keepers of peace and stability. Rather, they appear as a group serving to realize the wishes of the emperor. The army does not steer itself and Dio is quite explicit concerning the behaviour of the soldiers if they are not controlled by a good emperor. In Dio's narrative, the soldiers are basically driven by one single thing: the lust for money, which is, of course, a deeply un-stoic trait.

As an example, the soldiers saw no problem in Nero's participation in various artistic competitions in Greece. On the contrary, they continued praising him in the hope of receiving even more money.⁴⁰ It is precisely this soldierly lust that is the primary cause of the troubles in the year of the four emperors (i.e. 68-69 CE), where Dio stages Galba as the superior of the first three in terms of moral values.⁴¹ But because the soldiers of Vitellus were not satisfied with what they were given by Galba, they shifted their loyalty and eventually brought Vitellius to power.⁴² During the short reign of Vitellius Dio depicts the soldiers more frequently as a fundamentally immoral and criminal group.⁴³ In Dio's world, one can expect an immoral and brutal

³⁷ The quote: Cass. Dio 77[76].15.2.

³⁸ Cass. Dio 78[77].4.1^a.

³⁹ See e.g. Cass. Dio 78[77].9.1-3; 10.1; 10.4; 13.6.

⁴⁰ Cass. Dio 62[63].10.1-3.

⁴¹ Cass. Dio 63[64].2.1f.

⁴² Cass. Dio 63[64].4-5.1f.

⁴³ Cass. Dio 64[65].4.4.

regime when the soldiers are given such powers as Caracalla gave them. In this way Dio tells us that Caracalla did not understand his responsibility as the leader of the state.

The Stoic focus on the responsibility of the emperor and the potentially immense impact his actions can have as sole ruler is underlined in a concluding passage from Dio's evaluation of Caracalla. What Dio wants to show is Caracalla's fundamental destruction of the Roman state:

Cass. Dio 78[77].10.1-4 αὐτὸς δὲ τὰ χρήματα ἔς τε τοὺς στρατιώτας, ὡς ἔφαμεν, καὶ ἔς θηρία ἵππους τε ἑδαπάνη [...] οὕτω δὲ παρὰ πάντα τὸν τῆς ἀρχῆς αὐτοῦ χρόνον πᾶσα ἡ γῆ ἡ ὑπακούουσα αὐτῷ ἐπορθήθη ὥστε τοὺς Ῥωμαίους ποτὲ ἐν ἵπποδρομίᾳ ἄλλα τε συμβοῆσαι καὶ ὅτι 'τοὺς ζῶντας ἀπολοῦμεν, ἵνα τοὺς τεθνεώτας θάψωμεν.' καὶ γὰρ ἔλεγε πολλάκις ὅτι 'οὐδένα ἀνθρώπων πλὴν ἐμοῦ ἀργύριον ἔχειν δεῖ, ἵνα αὐτὸ τοῖς στρατιώταις χαρίζωμαι'.

The emperor kept spending money upon the soldiers, as we have said, and on wild animals and horses. [...] To such an extent was the entire world, so far as it owned his sway, devastated throughout his whole reign, that on one occasion the Romans at a horse-race shouted in unison this, among other things: "We shall do the living to death, that we may bury the dead". Indeed, he often used to say: "Nobody in the world should have money but me; and want it to bestow upon the soldiers".

5 The Strengthening of the Soul

A central idea of Stoic philosophy is the importance of strengthening the mind in order to cope with the vicissitudes of fortune. Throughout Stoic literature we learn how the mind can be taught to be able to resist unhealthy desires and feelings.⁴⁴ However, it is potentially weak and easily lead astray. Continuous training is needed. Seneca tells us the necessity of always navigating in a potentially corrupting world:

Sen. *Ad Luc.* 7.6-7 *Subducendus populo est tener animus et parum tenax recti: facile transitur ad plures. Socrati et Catoni et Laelio excutere morem suum dissimilis multitudo potuisset: adeo nemo nostrum, qui cum maxime concinnamus ingenium, ferre impetum vitiorum tam magno comitatu venientium potest. Unum exemplum luxuriae aut avaritiae multum mali facit: convictor delicatus paul-*

⁴⁴ See e.g. Sen. *Ep.* 2.1f; 80.1f; Sen. *Ira* 2.2-3; M. Aur. *Med.* 1.1; 2.1-12. On the ability to make the mind impenetrable see e.g. Engberg-Pedersen 2017, 142-5.

atim enervat et mollit, vicinus dives cupiditatem irritat, malignus comes quamvis candido et simplici rubiginem suam affricuit.

When a mind is impressionable and has none too firm a hold on what is right, it must be rescued from the crowd: it is so easy for it to go over to the majority. A Socrates, a Cato or a Laelius might have been shaken in his principles by a multitude of people different from himself: such is the measure of the inability of any of us, even as we perfect our personality's adjustment, to withstand the onset of vices when they come with such a mighty following. A single example of extravagance or greed does a lot of harm – an intimate who leads a pampered life gradually makes one soft and flabby; a wealthy neighbour provokes cravings in one; a companion with a malicious nature tends to rub off some of his rust even on someone of an innocent and open-hearted nature.⁴⁵

Thus, it is important constantly to strengthen the soul, keeping it away from potentially corrupting forces and guiding the mind in the right direction. According to such a view, the mind will quickly fall into ruin if its psychagogical training is stopped. It will be an inevitable consequence of decadent behaviour that the mind slowly but steadily falls apart. From this perspective, human nature is weak. This fits with the general evaluation Dio gives of Commodus: the young emperor was not born wicked. But he was weak and not accustomed to hard work. His mind was not ready for the potentially unlimited pleasures that life as an emperor would give him, although he was well educated.⁴⁶ As soon as he ascended the throne he longed for the luxurious life in Rome. That made him gradually more and more indifferent to administrative duties and more inclined to succumb to the pleasures of life. His lack of engagement in stately affairs had a deep impact on Roman society. We have seen how this unfolds in the reign of Pertinax.

5.1 Pertinax

Dio's and Herodian's narratives about Pertinax underline the fact that the ideal of a *civilis princeps* was a firmly established one, and this is their basis of judgment on the emperors: Pertinax is described as 'δημοτικός', moderate, humble and moreover as liked among the senators.⁴⁷ Thus, on the surface, Dio and Herodian are close to each other.

⁴⁵ Translation: Campbell 2014.

⁴⁶ Cass. Dio 73[72].1.1-2.

⁴⁷ Cass. Dio 74.3.4; 74.5.1-2; Hdn. 2.1.9; 2.2.6; 2.4.1-3. The word δημοτικός is not easily translated, meaning 'democratic' in some sense, but is perhaps closer to the latin '*civilis*'.

er, but on occasions the Stoic mind of Dio becomes apparent. When talking about the imperial family, both authors tell us that Pertinax sent his son away from Rome and that he did not let him participate in the pompous life in the palace. The passage illustrates how a Stoic perspective will change the overall expression, so both passages are quoted at length:

Cass. Dio 74.7.1-2 οὐτε δὲ τὴν γυναῖκα Αὐγουσταν οὔτε τὸν υἱὸν Καίσαρα, καίπερ ψηφισμένων ἡμῶν, ποιῆσαι ἠθέλησεν, ἀλλ' ἐκάτερον ἰσχυρῶς διεκρούσατο, εἴτ' οὖν ὅτι μηδέπω τὴν ἀρχὴν ἐρριζώνει, εἴτε καὶ ὅτι ἐκείνην τε ἀκολασταίνουσιν οὐκ ἡβουλήθη τὸ τῆς Αὐγούστης ὄνομα μᾶναι, καὶ τὸν υἱὸν παιδίον ἔτι ὄντα οὐκ ἠθέλησε, πρὶν παιδευθῆναι, τῷ τε ὄγκῳ καὶ τῇ ἐλπίδι τῇ ἐκ τοῦ ὀνόματος διαφθαρῆναι.

Yet he was unwilling to make his wife Augusta or his son Caesar, though we granted him permission. In fact, he emphatically rejected both proposals, either because he had not yet firmly rooted his own power or because he did not choose either to let his unchaste consort sully the name of Augusta or to permit his son, who was still a boy, to be spoiled by the glamour and the prospects involved in the title of Caesar before he had received his education.

Hdn. 2.4.9 οὕτω γὰρ μέτριος καὶ ἰσότημος ἦν ὥς καὶ τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἦδη μεράκιον ὄντα μηδὲ ἐς τὴν βασιλείον αὐλὴν ἀναγαγεῖν, ἀλλ' ἔν τε τῇ πατρὶά μένειν οἰκίᾳ, καὶ ἐς τὰ συνήθη προΐοντα διδασκαλεῖα καὶ γυμνάσια ἰδιωτεύοντα ὁμοίως τοῖς λοιποῖς παιδεύεσθαι τε καὶ πάντα πράττειν, οὐδαμοῦ τύφον ἢ πομπὴν παρεχόμενον βασιλικήν.

So unpretentious and modest was Pertinax, that he didn't bring his son into the imperial palace, even though he at this time was a young man. He stayed in the family's house where he continued in his regular school and gymnasium. In his studies as well as in all other activities he remained a private citizen like everybody else and displayed none of the imperial pomp and arrogance.

We should note that Herodian's version is fully focused on the ideal of a *civilis princeps*. Firstly, Pertinax was too modest to let his son get admission to the palace; secondly, the son remained a regular, Roman citizen. Dio, on the other hand, interprets these seemingly modest actions from a philosophical standpoint. It is here we see Dio's Stoicism: It was not simply about being a *civilis princeps*. Rather, the actions of Pertinax demonstrate that he did not want the imperial life in luxury to ruin his son's mind before he had received his

education (an education which, in line with Stoic thinking, was supposed to make the mind resistant to temptations later on). Dio analyses the motivations of Pertinax as based upon a fundamentally Stoic logic: it is necessary to discipline the mind before entering into a luxurious life, in order to understand that which must be avoided. Dio thus imagines a man who fully lives up to the ideals of the *civilis princeps* while also seeking ways to strengthen the mind, and so achieve an ideal that is also Stoic.

Dio's admiration for Pertinax is also found in his description of his death. This passage therefore needs to be analysed in greater detail. Epictetus gives one example of the way in which a Stoic ought to meet his end:

Epict. *diss.* 2.1.17-18 θάνατος τί ἐστίν; μορμολύκειον. στρέψας αὐτὸ κατὰ μαθεῖ· ἰδοῦ, πῶς οὐ δάκνει. τὸ σωματίον δεῖ χωρισθῆναι τοῦ πνευματίου, ὥς πρότερον ἐκεχώριστο, ἢ νῦν ἢ ὕστερον. τί οὖν ἀγανακτεῖς, εἰ νῦν; εἰ γὰρ μὴ νῦν, ὕστερον. διὰ τί; ἵνα ἡ περίοδος ἀνύηται τοῦ κόσμου.

What is death? A bugbear. Turn it about and learn what it is; see, it does not bite. The paltry body must be separated from the bit of spirit, either now or later, just as it existed apart from it before. Why are you grieved, then, if it be separated now? For if it be not separated now, it will be later. Why? So that the revolution of the universe may be accomplished.⁴⁸

How does this compare to Pertinax? If Dio wanted to characterise Pertinax through Stoic virtues, his way of coming to terms with his imminent death would be described in accordance to Stoic ideals. This is indeed what Dio tells us:

Cass. Dio 74.9 δυνηθεῖς γὰρ ἂν μάλιστα μὲν ἀποκτεῖναι τοὺς ἐπελθόντας τῇ τε γὰρ νυκτερινῇ φυλακῇ καὶ τοῖς ἰππεύσιν ὥπλιστο, καὶ ἦσαν καὶ ἄλλοι ἐν τῷ παλατίῳ τότε ἄνθρωποι πολλοί, εἰ δὲ μή, κατακρυφθῆναί γε καὶ διαφυγεῖν ποι τὰς τε πύλας τοῦ παλατίου καὶ τὰς ἄλλας τὰς διὰ μέσου θύρας κλείσας, τούτων μὲν οὐδέτερον ἐποίησεν, ἐλπίσας δὲ καταπλήξειν αὐτοὺς ὀφθεῖς καὶ πείσειν ἀκουσθεῖς ἀπήντησε τοῖς προσιοῦσιν ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ ἥδη οὖσιν.

For, even though he could in all probability have killed his assailants, – as he had in the night-guard and the cavalry at hand to protect him, and as there were also many people in the palace at the time, – or might at least have concealed himself and made his

⁴⁸ Translation: Oldfather 1925.

escape to some place or other, by closing the gates of the palace and the other intervening doors, he nevertheless adopted neither of these courses. Instead, hoping to overawe them by his appearance and to win them over by his words, he went to meet the approaching band, which was already inside the palace.

Dio approved of Pertinax as emperor, and he would probably have preferred him to have ruled longer. But here, Dio is ultimately evaluating the actions of Pertinax as being in line with Stoic ideals: a man who lived according to Stoic principles accepts his death as ever-imminent and welcomes it when it finds him. Being afraid of death is the symptom of a weak soul inhabiting a man who clings to the earthly life. It would have been fundamentally un-stoic if Pertinax had lamented his death and ran for his life. Dio admires the way in which Pertinax showed his strength of mind by acting with courage and trying to talk sense into his eventual murderers.

We end this discussion of psychagogical training with Dio's evaluation of Plautianus, the praetorian prefect of Severus. In line with Stoic thinking, Dio has Severus lament the death of Plautianus with the message that human nature is too weak to handle the amount of honour he received.⁴⁹ Thereby, he actually lets Severus show some sort of Stoic insight, although it is only in a rear-view mirror. According to Dio, the senators were accomplices because they poured such adulation over Plautianus. This is basically the story of Sejanus (Tiberius' praetorian prefect) over again. During the reign of Tiberius, the senators realized that the emperor was the only one to whom they could give such excessive honours. Sejanus went mad and effectively destroyed the political culture.⁵⁰

Now, this is not to be misunderstood. Dio is not talking about excessive praise of the emperor. Rather, the point is that the emperor should be expected to be able to cope with the adulation which *he* will inevitably receive from the senators. The emperor is indeed supposed to be something else, something more, than the rest of the elite – also on a psychological level (i.e. the ideals of the wise man). The other Stoic point in all this is that it is the emperor who must control the senators so that they don't end up ruining the political culture. Here, the elite is once again presented as a potentially corrupting force, just as was explained in Book 52: the emperor, Maecenas advises, must make all the appointments and control other members of the elite who would otherwise corrupt the state with their individ-

⁴⁹ Cass. Dio 77[76].5.1.

⁵⁰ On the Senate's responsibility for the corruption of Sejanus, see Cass. Dio 58.12.6. For the Senators' adulation of Plautianus, see Cass. Dio 76[75].14.6-7. On the critique of the power given to Plautianus by Severus, see Cass. Dio 76[75].15.1-6.

ualistic aims.⁵¹ According to the Stoics, surrendering to licentiousness, greed, and earthly pleasures are closely connected to having a weak or troubled mind.⁵² In this way, Plautianus becomes the most un-stoic man of the Severan regime. He never turned quite as brutal as Sejanus, but he was equally greedy and a slave to indulgence.⁵³

5.2 An Iron Age handling of a usurper

Dio's overall evaluation of Severus is not a subject for the present paper. Severus was criticised for several reasons, but one particular episode was especially controversial to Dio. This occurred in the Severan civil war after the death of Pertinax. When he had finally triumphed over Albinus, the last of his political opponents, Dio tells us the following:

Cass. Dio 76[75].7.3-4 ἰδὼν δ' οὖν τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ, καὶ πολλὰ μὲν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς πολλὰ δὲ τῇ γλώττῃ χαρισάμενος, τὸ μὲν ἄλλο ρίψῃναι ἐκέλευσε, τὴν δὲ κεφαλὴν ἐς τὴν Ῥώμην πέμψας ἀνεσταύρωσεν. ἐφ' οἷς δῆλος γενόμενος ὥς οὐδὲν εἴη οἱ αὐτοκράτορος ἀγαθοῦ, ἐτι μᾶλλον ἡμᾶς τε καὶ τὸν δῆμον, οἷς ἐπέστειλεν, ἐξεφόβησεν: ὅτε γὰρ παντὸς ἤδη τοῦ ὠπλισμένου κεκρατηκῶς ἐξέχεεν ἐς τοὺς ἀνόπλους πᾶν ὅσον ὀργῆς ἐς αὐτοὺς ἐκ τοῦ πρὶν χρόνου ἡθοίκει.

The emperor, after viewing the body of Albinus and feasting his eyes upon it to the full, while giving free rein to his tongue as well, ordered all but the head to be cast away, but sent the head to Rome to be exposed on a pole. As this action showed clearly that he possessed none of the qualities of a good ruler, he alarmed both us and the populace more than ever by the commands that he sent; for now that he had overcome all armed opposition, he was venting upon the unarmed all the wrath that he had stored up against them in the past.

It is interesting that this single episode has so marked a bearing on Dio's overall evaluation of Severus as an emperor. At first glance, how one treats one's dead enemies seems to have little to do with statesmanship. Or has it? In Stoic philosophy *ira* (anger) and *crudelitas* (brutality) constitute a direct antithesis to *clementia*. Following Seneca,

⁵¹ On the choosing of men for official posts, see Cass. Dio 52.14.3. On the controlling of the potentially destructive members of the elite, see Cass. Dio 52.20.1-4.

⁵² See e.g. Sen., *Ep.* 8; M. Aur. *Med.* 2.10; 2.16.

⁵³ The greediness of Plautianus, see Cass. Dio 76[75].14.2-5. His licentiousness, see Cass. Dio 76[75].15.7.

ira can be said to be the physical manifestation of the desire for revenge or brutality. Thus, *ira* is when the individual actually acts on unhealthy feelings.⁵⁴ If *clementia* is forgotten too many times, all humanity will disappear from the soul and only a cruel, evil beast will remain. The result will be *crudelitas* (brutality).⁵⁵ Thus, according to the Stoics *ira* is one of the worst feelings of all. To Dio, such brutality from Severus showed his true nature, so to speak – a wise man, a Cato from the *Pharsalia*, could never act in this way. This beast lurked deep within Severus' character, and therefore he was ultimately incapable of being a just, righteous, and good emperor.⁵⁶ A wise man will always be capable of suppressing affections, vices, and terrible feelings. These episodes, in which Severus showed himself at his most cruel, revealed to Dio that his soul lacked the moral value and mental strength necessary to be a good emperor.⁵⁷

6 Final Remarks

Existing scholarship on Dio has traditionally focused on the senatorial class and therefore ultimately on the relationship between the emperor and the elite. However, this focus has to some degree neglected the fact that Dio is in fact not too optimistic about the elite's qualities as a leading organ. Throughout his books on the Principate, the elite is closer to an irrational group that corrupts the system than it is to a competent arm of government. Dio's link between the emperor and society as a whole is at least as strong as his link between the emperor and the elite. This has largely gone unnoticed in earlier scholarship.

In his contemporary narrative, Dio does not devote much space to the institutional workings of the political system. Rather, his interest lies in explaining the different roles played by various individuals and groups, ultimately evaluated on the basis of traditional Stoic values. In line with Stoic doctrine, Dio's overarching interest concerning his contemporary narrative is to explain how this period lacked a rational governing force. There was one, and that was Pertinax, but he ruled too briefly to right the wrongs of Commodus. Thereby the whole system became corrupted. Dio shows us the way in which bad (that is, unwise) decisions consistently contributed not only to a

⁵⁴ Sen. *Ira* 2.1-4.

⁵⁵ Sen. *Ira* 2.5; 2.12-13.

⁵⁶ For the Stoics, *crudelitas* was a sign of a corrupted mind. We see this statement in Sen. *Ira* 2.5; 2.12-13.

⁵⁷ Sen. *Ira* 2.1; M. Aur. *Med.* 2.10. Executions and bloodlust are clear signs of an emperor lacking *clementia*, as shown by Kragelund 2016, 213-36.

dysfunctional political system, but also to a fundamentally immoral world where the wrong groups held too much power. We have observed that Dio sees the political elite as a potentially destructive organ; the army is another. It becomes un-stoic in the sense that the emperors never fulfilled their task of acting as the personified reason of the state so as to control its irrational elements.

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Cassius Dio and the Principate

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Misunderstanding History: Past and Present in Cassius Dio's Contemporary Books

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Abstract At the heart of Cassius Dio's *Roman History* was the charting of changes in government from the early kings to the monarchy established by Augustus, with particular emphasis on the decline of the Republic and the transition to monarchy. Throughout Dio's analysis we observe certain individuals who serve as examples to be emulated or avoided. In Dio's own age, emperors generally misunderstood or misinterpreted, willingly or unwillingly, these examples from the past. These failures allow us to consider Dio's understanding of the function of historiography and his ideas about the utility of his own work. While this may lead us to the negative conclusion that Dio believed all forms of government eventually degenerate, it also leaves open the possibility that Dio considered the writing of history, and thus the guarantee of a proper understanding of the past, to have positive, transformative consequences for Rome's monarchy.

Keywords Cassius Dio. Contemporary historiography. Severan dynasty. Pertinax. Septimius Severus. Caracalla. Macrinus. Elagabalus.

Summary 1 The Function of Cassius Dio's Contemporary Books. – 2 Pertinax: Not Quite Augustus. – 3 Septimius Severus as a New Trajan. – 4 Septimius Severus and Sulla, Marius, and Augustus. – 5 Septimius Severus and Hereditary Succession. – 6 Macrinus and Elagabalus, Between Septimius Severus and Caracalla. – 7 Conclusion: A Changed Monarchy.




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Cassius Dio turned to the writing of history, like many others, during a time of crisis.¹ Specifically, he cites the civil wars that were fought after the death of Commodus as the reason why he first took up the pen (73[72].23.1-3). His initial steps as a writer were shorter works, on portents that foretold the rise of Septimius Severus and on the civil wars that followed the death of Commodus. After approval from many, including the new *princeps*, Septimius Severus, Dio soon conceived of a much larger work – not a monograph on civil wars or divine signs, but one that covered the entirety of Roman history down to his own age. From Dio's surviving text, we can see that it was not only the civil wars of 193-197 CE that prompted Dio to write history. These civil wars were a symptom of a rupture in the governance of the Roman world. As Dio specifically states, the death of Marcus Aurelius brought an end to a golden kingship and was the beginning of a period of "iron and rust" under Marcus' son, Commodus (72[71].36.4).

Dio's decision to write history in the aftermath of these changes raises questions about how he conceived of the purpose of his work, especially in the absence of explicit statements on the topic. We unfortunately do not possess the full preface to the work, upon which we rely for guidance in interpreting so many other works of history. Despite this absence, notices throughout Dio's history highlight his main concerns. Scholars have long recognized the main themes of the work, namely the changes in the form of Rome's government over time and especially Dio's focus on the late Republican period of dynasts, its civil wars, and the change to a period of monarchy, Dio's preferred form of government.² Less clear are the goals that Dio had in mind for his history. Was his history a "possession for all time" like the work of Thucydides, his greatest influence?³ Or was Dio attempting to speak to his peers and contemporaries about the direction of the principate of his own age?⁴ Was he a moralizing historian, and did he see his work as having some sort of educational purpose?⁵

¹ Cf. Marincola 1997, 34-9. I would like to thank the editors and reviewers for their valuable comments, which helped improve this paper greatly; all errors are my own. Translations of Greek and Latin texts are from the Loeb Classical Library.

² For Dio's interest in changes in government at Rome, see, e.g., Kuhn-Chen 2002, 183-201; Fromentin 2013 (who specifically attempts to reconstruct the content of Dio's lost preface); for his interest in monarchy in particular, see, e.g., Rich 1989, 92 and Madsen 2016, 138-9, as well as Bono's contribution to this volume.

³ Thucydides' influence on Dio has been observed since antiquity and has been related to both his writing style and outlooks, especially his views of human nature; on the latter point, see, among others, Reinhold 1988, 215-17.

⁴ Discussions of this sort center largely on the Agrippa-Maecenas debate in book 52, which Millar 1964, 107 calls "a serious, coherent, and fairly comprehensive plan for coping with what Dio conceived to be the evils of his time".

⁵ For Dio's educational aims, see Lintott 1997, 2499-500.

These categories are not mutually exclusive, and it will not be necessary, or even possible, in this paper to explore all of them. What I propose here is an examination of the inter-connectedness of Dio's work and its relationship to Dio's views of the purpose and utility of his project. As history of the entire Roman past, Dio's work is rife with correspondences throughout time, which serve to show the destructive consequences of certain behaviours and political changes, and which thus give Dio's work an overall interpretive framework.⁶ Thus we can understand how the democracy of the Republic gave way to the monarchy through figures such as Marius, Sulla, Pompey, and Julius Caesar.⁷ As many have observed, Dio was a monarchist and Augustus stands at the most significant transformational point in the history and a figure to be emulated by his successors. The later emperors would either succeed in this regard (for example in the figures of Vespasian, Trajan, or especially Marcus Aurelius) or fail (for example, Caligula, Nero, or Domitian).

In Dio's contemporary books, we find that the emperors generally fall into the latter group. Pertinax rushed in his attempts to reform, Severus exhibited the wrong type of behaviour after the end of civil war and in his choice of hereditary succession, and Caracalla, Macrinus, and Elagabalus chose to emulate the wrong sorts of leaders. In each of these cases, the reader has already been primed to reach back to earlier portions of Dio's work and acknowledge the failures of Dio's contemporary emperors through this lens. In what follows, I argue that the emperors of Dio's own age frequently misunderstood or misinterpreted, willingly or unwillingly, the Roman past, and that these failures are brought out by Dio in earlier parts of his work. My goal is to move beyond a comparison of emperors to figures such as Augustus or Marcus Aurelius and to consider what the failures in these areas tell us about the nature of Dio's overall project.⁸

The self-reflective nature of the history suggests that Dio wished to elevate the importance not only of historiography generally, but especially his own history. With an analysis of the "use and abuse" of history in his contemporary books, I will suggest that Dio believed that knowledge of the past could lead to stability and good govern-

⁶ *Contra* the negative view put forward by Millar 1964, 45, that Dio's work was a mere record of events, and not an interpretation of them. Kemezis (2014, 90-149) has recently advanced a reading of Dio's text that foregrounds the reading the Late Republican and Augustan books as means of understanding Dio as an author of the Severan period; cf. the approach of Gowing 1992, 289-94.

⁷ The bibliography on this topic has expanded significantly in recent years; for Dio's view of the fall of the Republic, see especially Fechner 1986; Sion-Jenkis 2000; Rees 2011; Burden-Strevens 2016, and Lindholmer 2017.

⁸ This approach can be seen in, e.g., Bering-Staschewski 1981; Martini 2010, and Scott 2015. For Augustus as Dio's ideal, see especially Reinhold, Swan 1990.

ance, whereas its absence led to misinformed judgments and poor rule. Furthermore, Dio's work, which came after a long dearth of history writing *ab urbe condita* down to one's own time, serves, aspirationally, as a means of correcting the misunderstanding of the past that Dio observed in his own day.⁹

1 The Function of Cassius Dio's Contemporary Books

For most of the twentieth century, Cassius Dio's *Roman History* was poorly received, to a large extent because of the views put forth by Schwartz (1899) and Millar (1964). These two scholars saw Dio as a rather shallow imitator of Thucydides and as one whose main goal was to simply write the history without much thought toward historical outlook or overall goal. Among other critiques, Schwartz (1899, 1690-1) censured Dio for having no understanding of the oligarchy that governed the Republic and describes his moralizing as insubstantial and meaningless. And although Schwartz allowed that Dio's work becomes richer for the period of the Principate and especially for his own time enjoys a better reputation than Herodian and the *Historia Augusta*, the work as a whole is ultimately marred by his misunderstanding of the Republic, for which his history is the only continuous narrative that survives (1899, 1692). Millar's judgments fall along the same lines, although they are at times even harsher. For example, Millar (1964, 171) concluded that Dio had no narrative goal in mind, even for the history of his own period, and that his only goal was to write "as far as fate would allow" and that "the result was inevitably disappointing".

Taking a more positive approach, we can assess Dio's reasons for producing a new Roman history and ending it with a contemporary portion, narrated primarily from the author's point of view as a Roman senator. The importance of Dio's personal experience can be gleaned from his first-person statements in the final books. At 74[73].4.2 he explicitly marks the point when autopsy provides evidence for his reports and replaces his reliance on the authority of others. Later in the same book (74[73].18.3-4), Dio apologizes for including material that would generally have been considered unworthy of his history, except for the fact that he was recording what the emperor did and what he himself witnessed. On the latter point, Dio goes on to say that his eyewitness status made him the one who could most accurately report these events. This passage elevates the im-

⁹ On the lack of historiography *ab urbe condita* since the time of Livy, see Marincola 1997, 32; Mehl 2011, 152-3; Kemezis 2014, 92. Contemporary historiography in Greek had been absent in Rome as well: Kemezis 2010, 286.

portance of Dio's own experience, even at the expense of the dignity of his work. Moving to the end of the history, we find a corollary to the comments that we saw at the outset of the contemporary portion. At 80[80].1.2, Dio notes that his absence from Rome precluded him from any longer providing an accurate account of events. He thus ends his account summarily, and not with the end of a reign but at the point that he himself departed from politics at Rome. According to Dio, times were grim, for himself especially, as the emperor had to protect him from the threatening soldiers; the only thing he could do was, like Hector, escape "out of the dust and the slaying of men and the blood and the uproar" (80[80].5.1-3, quoting *Il.* 11.163-4).

The final books were important, in Dio's eyes, precisely because they record the experiences of the senator himself. Dio, of course, was hardly the first one to elevate personal experience in the writing of history, as Thucydides had long ago established the primacy of contemporary historiography. Dio's decision, however, to note the importance of his own experience suggests that he may have envisioned his work, at least conceptually, along the lines of an historian such as Polybius.¹⁰ In this comparison, we can emphasize Polybius' description of his history as "pragmatic" and having moral and educational goals.¹¹ Despite the fact that the meaning of the phrase "pragmatic history" has been a matter of debate, we observe in other areas of Polybius' history his belief in the importance of personal experience and even, as Moore (2019) has recently argued, that history itself was a vehicle for gaining the type of experience needed by the politician or statesman.

Polybius also stresses the importance of his own participation in the events that he narrates. Polybius' decision to alter his original endpoint, changing it from Rome's victory over Macedon in 167 BCE to 146 BCE, was in fact made because of his experience of the period:

Polyb. 3.4.12-13 διὸ καὶ τῆς πραγματείας ταύτης τοῦτ' ἔσται τελεσιούργημα, τὸ γινῶναι τὴν κατάστασιν παρ' ἐκάστοις, ποία τις ἦν μετὰ τὸ καταγωνισθῆναι τὰ ὅλα καὶ πεσεῖν εἰς τὴν τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἐξουσίαν ἕως τῆς μετὰ ταῦτα πάλιν ἐπιγενομένης ταραχῆς

¹⁰ Dio has generally not been seen as an heir to Polybius, either in terms of historical thinking or use of source material. As to the former, Millar 1964, 171 put it rather bluntly: "Dio was no Polybius". Regarding Dio's possible use of Polybius as a source, the most recent assessment argues that there is little evidence to believe that Dio followed the tradition put down by Polybius (Foulon 2016). Yet that hardly means that Dio did not know Polybius. Aside from the general unlikelihood of that, Dio (fr. 1.2) claims to have read almost everything written about the Romans, which must have been largely true, considering the scope of his work.

¹¹ On the debate over the meaning of "pragmatic history", see Thornton 2012 for an accessible overview with citations.

καὶ κινήσεως. ὑπὲρ ἧς διὰ τὸ μέγεθος τῶν ἐν αὐτῇ πράξεων καὶ τὸ παράδοξον τῶν συμβαινόντων, τὸ δὲ μέγιστον, διὰ τὸ τῶν πλείστων μὴ μόνον αὐτόπτης, ἀλλ' ὧν μὲν συνεργὸς ὧν δὲ καὶ χειριστὴς γεγονέναι, προήχθην οἷον ἀρχὴν ποιησάμενος ἄλλην γράφειν.

So the final end achieved by this work will be, to gain knowledge of what was the condition of each people after all had been crushed and had come under the dominion of Rome, until the disturbed and troubled time that afterwards ensued. About this latter, owing to the importance of the actions and the unexpected character of the events, and chiefly because I not only witnessed most but took part and even directed some, I was induced to write as if starting on a fresh work.

Polybius, of course, did not have to extend his work; rather, he decided to do so, in large part, because he played a role in the affairs of that period.¹²

Let us return to Millar's claim that Dio wanted only to write as far as fate allowed him. The fact that Dio ends the history with his own departure from political life demonstrates the importance of an accounting of the period that he experienced. His history as a whole showed the changes of government throughout the Roman past, and by ending in his own day Dio allows readers to judge for themselves whether Rome was still on a path to prosperity, as Dio saw it when the Republic changed to a monarchy. Dio, too, was uncertain of the endpoint of his history. He researched down to the death of Septimius Severus, but he continued on as long as fate allowed (73[72].23.3, 5).¹³ His reason for continuing was probably much the same as Polybius: that he himself could attest to the situation better than anyone else. Like Polybius, Dio uses his own experiences to provide for the reader firsthand examples and an accounting that would be crucial for the reader in assessing the argument of the work as a whole.

¹² On this point, see McGing 2010, 76.

¹³ This passage is the main starting point regarding Dio's time of composition, which remains a contentious issue. For a review, see Scott 2018, 10-14. Letta 2019 has recently reconsidered the question in light of the theories put forth since his initial argument, re-affirming his belief in a late dating of the history, which Dio would have begun after the death of Septimius Severus and completed sometime in the 230s CE.

2 Pertinax: Not Quite Augustus

The defining factor of Pertinax' reign is its brevity – a mere eighty-seven days (74[73].10.3). His tale is a cautionary one, as he came to power ostensibly through a vote of the Senate but in reality through the favour of the praetorian prefect Laetus, and indeed it was the fall from Laetus' favour that brought about his end.¹⁴ In this short period of time, however, he impressed Dio in a variety of ways. In addition to the usual honours Pertinax took the title *princeps senatus*, in accordance with the old custom (74[73].5.1).¹⁵ In Dio's eyes, this made Pertinax more of a *civilis princeps* – certainly a good thing, as Dio had earlier praised Augustus for skilfully making such a change earlier (56.43.4).¹⁶ He also swore to never put senators to death, and he sold off Commodus' luxuries in order to re-fill a depleted treasury (74[73].5.1-2).¹⁷

Dio provides a vivid description of the events that led to Pertinax' fall. After carrying out some unspecified reforms, Pertinax lost the favour of the soldiers and freedmen, some of whom entered the Senate house to promote their preferred replacement, Falco (74[73].8.2). Falco, however, was spared by Pertinax, even though the Senate had condemned him. It was not long before Pertinax was murdered, partly through the machinations of Laetus, who pretended he was putting soldiers to death over the Falco affair at the emperor's orders (74[73].9.1).

Pertinax met his end in the palace, facing down an angry band of praetorians, an act which Dio describes as either noble or stupid (74[73].9.3, *πρᾶγμα εἶτ' οὖν γενναῖον εἴτε ἀνόητον*). Dio further claims that Pertinax could have fought the soldiers off with the night guards or even hidden himself to secure his survival, but Pertinax instead tried to astound them with his appearance and words (74[73].9.4).

¹⁴ In Dio's version, Laetus facilitated Pertinax' rise and brought his fall, noting that Laetus never showed any loyalty to the emperor (74[73].6.3). For a review of the various sources, see Appelbaum 2007.

¹⁵ For the importance of Pertinax's use of this title, as well as further consideration of Pertinax' reforms, see also Pistellato's contribution to this volume.

¹⁶ In the former passage, Dio says that Pertinax "wished to be δημοτικὸς", whereas in the latter, he writes that Augustus "mixed monarchy with democracy" (τὴν μοναρχίαν τῇ δημοκρατίᾳ μίξας). These terms, δημοτικός and δημοκρατία, are practically synonymous in Dio and should be equated with the Latin term *civilis* (Wallace-Hadrill 1982, 44). For the concept of the *civilis princeps* in Dio's work, see Bono 2018, as well as the contributions of Bono and Madsen to this volume.

¹⁷ Pertinax also decided not to make his wife Augusta or his son Caesar (74[73].7). This move confused Dio a bit, since the Senate had granted these honours. While Dio provides possible explanations, the likeliest is that Pertinax recognized the failure of inherited succession that had resulted in Commodus' coming to power and wanted to avoid the same charge.

This tactic failed, and Pertinax was eventually struck dead, along with Eclectus, and his head was cut off and placed atop a spear for display (74[73].10.1-2). It is at this point that we receive Dio's final judgment: Pertinax failed to understand that restoring the state required both wisdom and time – it could not be all completed at once.¹⁸

Bering-Staschewski (1981, 44-5) has observed that Dio's portrait of Pertinax shows how he fell short of the ideal of Marcus Aurelius. While it may be true that Pertinax was not the perfect emperor that Marcus was, it must also be admitted that the circumstances of his reign were not the same. This comparison, then, ultimately misses the point. Two points should be made instead. First, a significant change occurred under Commodus, which Marcus did not have to deal with, namely the growth of the praetorian prefect and guard. This growth in power ultimately brought about Pertinax' fall, no matter how much senatorial support he had. Second, although Marcus met challenges during his reign, he did not need to enact a complete settlement of the state. Pertinax, however, needed to re-order the state, in the same way that Augustus did, and Dio's wording at 74[73].10.3, πολιτική κατάσταση, recalls the comments in Augustus' necrology, that the first princeps "transferred the government in a way to give it the greatest power, and vastly strengthened it" (56.44.2 τὸ πολίτευμα πρὸς τε τὸ κράτιστον μετεκόσμησε καὶ ἰσχυρῶς ἐκράτυνεν). The language also recalls the statement in the Greek version of the *Res Gestae*, that Octavian was made consul by the people and chosen as one of the triumvirs "to settle the affairs of the state" (ἐπὶ τῇ καταστάσει τῶν δημοσίων πραγμάτων). While Dio does not use this vocabulary elsewhere in his extant history, the idea recalls the figure of Augustus, who firmly established monarchy in Rome.¹⁹

This recollection brings the reader back to the central section of the history, which traces the period of dynasts through to the rise of young Caesar and beginning of monarchy. This process was lengthy, which is stressed by the number of references to the stops and starts that it went through.²⁰ Further, even after the civil wars of the triumviral period Augustus did not consolidate his power in a short period. Dio spends an entire book (53) on the settlements of the 20s BCE. The length of this process stands in direct contrast to the brevity of Pertinax' reign, which Dio stresses in his brief eulo-

¹⁸ 74[73].10.3. Appelbaum 2007, 203-4 suggests that the displeasure of the praetorians was rooted in Pertinax' attempts to reform the body. For the death of Pertinax interpreted through a stoic lens, see Noe and Pistellato in this volume.

¹⁹ I thank Antonio Pistellato for helping make this connection, for which see also his contribution to this volume.

²⁰ For example, Dio suggests at 44.1.2 that Julius Caesar had introduced a monarchy in Rome, but it is not until 52.1.1 that he states that had changed to a monarchy, "strictly speaking".

gy (74[73].10.3). Dio's Pertinax felt that he could quickly conciliate both praetorians and Senate, but he did not realize how much work needed to be done to repair the balance of power in the state. Just as Pertinax did not remember his example of Augustus, he also did not understand the break that occurred between Marcus and Commodus. Dio clearly pointed this out, with his famous comment on the descent from the golden kingship of Marcus to a period of iron and rust. Pertinax, an accomplished figure under Marcus (e.g., 72[71].3.2, 22.1), seems to have underestimated the change that had occurred and what it would take to rectify the situation. Readers of Dio's history would know otherwise.

3 Septimius Severus as a New Trajan

In 193 CE Septimius Severus decided to challenge the rule of Didius Julianus from his position in Pannonia, and his march toward Italy revealed the fragility of Julianus' hold on power.²¹ Dio reports that Severus took Ravenna without opposition and that praetorians turned against Julianus. Julianus' attempts to get the Senate to name Severus his co-emperor failed; instead, the Senate condemned Julianus, deified Pertinax, and hailed Severus as emperor. Julianus was killed, like Pertinax, in the palace.

In the aftermath of these events Severus carefully orchestrated his entrance into Rome, as Dio explains:

Cass. Dio 75[74].1.3-5 πράξας δὲ ὁ Σεουήρος ταῦτα ἐς τὴν Ῥώμην ἔσῃει, [καὶ] μέχρι μὲν τῶν πυλῶν ἐπὶ τε τοῦ ἵππου καὶ ἐν ἐσθῇτι ἵππικῇ ἔλθων, ἐντεῦθεν δὲ τὴν τε πολιτικὴν ἀλλαξάμενος καὶ βαδίσας· καὶ αὐτῷ καὶ ὁ στρατὸς πᾶς, καὶ οἱ πεζοὶ καὶ οἱ ἵππεῖς, ὥπλισμένοι παρηκολούθησαν. καὶ ἐγένετο ἡ θέα πασῶν ὧν ἑώρακα λαμπροτάτη· ἥ τε γὰρ πόλις πᾶσα ἄνθεσί τε καὶ δάφναις ἐστεφάνωτο καὶ ἱματίοις ποικίλοις ἐκεκόσμητο, φωσί τε καὶ θυμιάμασιν ἔλαμπε, καὶ οἱ ἄνθρωποι λευχειμονοῦντες καὶ γανύμενοι πολλὰ ἐπευφύμουν, οἳ τε στρατιῶται ἐν τοῖς ὅπλοις ὥσπερ ἐν πανηγύρει τινὶ πομπῇς ἐκπρεπόντως ἀνεστρέφοντο, καὶ προσέτι ἡμεῖς ἐν κόσμῳ περιήειμεν. ὁ δ' ὄμιλος ἰδεῖν τε αὐτὸν καὶ τι φεγγομένου ἀκοῦσαι, ὥσπερ τι ὑπὸ τῆς τύχης ἡλλοιωμένου, ποθοῦντες ἡρεθίζοντο· καὶ τινες καὶ ἐμετεώριζον ἀλλήλους, ὅπως ἐξ ὑψηλοτέρου αὐτὸν κατίδωσιν.

After doing this Severus entered Rome. He advanced as far as the gates on horseback and in cavalry costume, but there he changed to civilian attire and proceeded on foot; and the entire army, both

²¹ For this and what follows, see 74[73].17.

infantry and cavalry, accompanied him in full armour. The spectacle proved the most brilliant of any that I have witnessed; for the whole city had been decked with garlands of flowers and laurel and adorned with richly coloured stuffs, and it was ablaze with torches and burning incense; the citizens, wearing white robes and with radiant countenances, uttered many shouts of good omen; the soldiers, too, stood out conspicuous in their armour as they moved about like participants in some holiday procession; and finally, we senators were walking about in state. The crowd chafed in its eagerness to see him to hear him say something, as if he had been somehow changed by his good fortune; and some of them held one another aloft, that from a higher position they might catch sight of him.

Severus knew that first impressions were important, and he entered the city not as a conquering general, but as a *civilis princeps*. He quickly connected himself to the favoured Pertinax, and the reaction of the Senate and people of Rome was one of great expectation.

The description of this entrance is similar to the one we see of Trajan, as in Pliny's *Panegyricus* (22, excerpted):

Ac primum, qui dies ille, quo exspectatus desideratusque urbem tuam ingressus es! Iam hoc ipsum, quod ingressus es, quam mirum laetumque! Nam priores invehī et importari solebant: non dico quadriugo curru, et albetibus equis, sed humeris hominum, quod arrogantius erat. Tu sola corporis proceritate elatior aliis et excelsior, non de patientia nostra quendam triumphum, sed de superbia principum egisti. Ergo non aetas quemquam, non valetudo, non sexus retardavit, quo minus oculos insolito spectaculo impleret [...]. Videres referta tecta ac laborantia, ac ne eum quidem vacantem locum, qui non nisi suspensum et instabile vestigium caperet; oppletas undique vias, angustumque tramitem relictum tibi; alacrem hinc atque inde populum, ubique par gaudium paremque clamorem.

Now first of all, think of the day when you entered your city, so long awaited and so much desired! The very method of your entry won delight and surprise, for your predecessors chose to be borne, or carried in, not satisfied even to be drawn by four white horses in a triumphal carriage, but lifted up on human shoulders in their overbearing pride. You towered above us only because of your own splendid physique; your triumph did not rest on our humiliation, won as it was over imperial arrogance. Thus neither age, health nor sex held your subjects back from feasting their eyes on this unexpected sight.... Roofs could be seen sagging under the crowds they bore, not a vacant inch of ground was visible except under a foot poised to step, streets were packed on both sides leav-

ing only a narrow passage for you, on every side the excited populace, cheers and rejoicing everywhere.

Although there is no parallel account of Trajan's entrance into Rome in Dio's surviving history, there is other evidence suggesting that Severus took him as a model as he entered Rome in 193 CE.²² Dio tells us of two main actions that Trajan took at the beginning of his reign:

Cass. Dio 69.5.2, 4 ὥς δὲ αὐτοκράτωρ ἐγένετο, ἐπέστειλε τῇ βουλῇ αὐτοχειρίᾳ ἄλλα τε καὶ ὥς οὐδένα ἄνδρα ἀγαθὸν ἀποσφάξει ἢ ἀτιμάσοι, καὶ ταῦτα καὶ ὄρκους οὐ τότε μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ ὕστερον ἐπιστώσατο. Αἰλιανὸν δὲ καὶ τοὺς δορυφόρους τοὺς κατὰ Νέρουα στασιάσαντας, ὥς καὶ χρησόμενός τι αὐτοῖς, μεταπεμψάμενος ἐκποδῶν ἐποίησατο. ἐς δὲ τὴν Ῥώμην ἐσελθὼν πολλὰ ἐποίει πρὸς τε διόρθωσιν τῶν κοινῶν καὶ πρὸς χάριν τῶν ἀγαθῶν.

When he became emperor, he sent a letter to the senate, written with his own hand, in which he declared, among other things, that he would not slay nor disfranchise any good man; and he confirmed this by oaths not only at the time but also later. He sent for Aelianus and the Praetorians who had mutinied against Nerva, pretending that he was going to employ them for some purpose, and then put them out of the way. When he came to Rome, he did much to reform the administration of affairs and much to please the better element.

Parallels to Severus' actions are observable. First, Severus punished the praetorians who murdered Pertinax, which Dio describes before the entry itself (75[74].1.1-2). But in a twist, it was not the praetorians who caused unrest in the city under Severus, as it had been for Trajan. Instead, Dio explains:

Cass. Dio 75[74].2.3 αἰτίαν <τε> ἔσχεν ἐπὶ τῷ πλήθει στρατιωτῶν ὁχλώδῃ τὴν πόλιν ποιῆσαι καὶ δαπάνῃ χρημάτων περιττῇ τὸ κοινὸν βαρῦναι, καὶ τὸ μέγιστον ὅτι μὴ ἐν τῇ τῶν συνόντων οἱ εὐνοίᾳ ἀλλ' ἐν τῇ ἐκείνων ἰσχύϊ τὴν ἐλπίδα τῆς σωτηρίας ἐποιεῖτο.

He was blamed for making the city turbulent through the presence of so many troops and for burdening the State by his excessive expenditures of money, and most of all, for placing his hope

²² Severus' intentional attempt to connect to Trajan can be observed elsewhere. It is seen most obviously in his titulature, in which he traces his lineage back to Trajan and Nerva (Cooley 2007, 386-7). He also seems to have proclaimed his conquering of Parthia and taken the title of *Parthicus Maximus* on January 28, 198 CE, which was the hundredth anniversary of Trajan's accession (Birley 2000, 130).

of safety in the strength of his army rather than in the good will of his associates in the government.

Severus also followed the tradition of promising not to put any senators to death, which Dio follows up with the caustic remark: "Yet he himself was the first to violate this law instead of keeping it, and made away with many senators; indeed, Julius Solon himself, who framed this decree at his behest, was murdered not long afterwards. There were many things Severus did that were not to our liking".²³

From Dio's account, with help from Pliny, we get the impression that despite Severus' attempts to recall the figure of Trajan, he was unable to keep up the appearance. In this example we see Dio's account as a corrective to the image that Severus was trying to cultivate – not just that he explains how Severus fell away from it, but how, although Severus carefully chose whom to imitate, knowledge of the past would render that image hollow and ineffective. Severus might at first seem a marvel to behold as he entered Rome, but his actions betrayed his outward appearance.

4 Septimius Severus and Sulla, Marius, and Augustus

Despite his triumphant entrance into Rome in 193 CE, it would be several wars and more civil war before Severus was able to hold the position as princeps unchallenged. He first carried out a campaign against Pescennius Niger, who had been proclaimed emperor by his troops in Syria and whom he finally defeated at the Battle of Issus in May 194 CE.²⁴ In the following year Severus stripped from Clodius Albinus the title of Caesar, and by the end of that year Albinus had been declared an enemy of the state. Meanwhile Severus elevated his son Caracalla as Caesar.²⁵ Conflict with Albinus was inevitable and would occur at Lugdunum, with huge forces on both sides.²⁶ Severus prevailed in a difficult battle, and Albinus died by suicide, thus leaving Severus as the victor in the civil wars that raged from 193-197 CE.

The death of Albinus is an important inflection point for Dio's story about Severus. Dio's description of the aftermath of the battle is graphic and incisive; he writes that the battle resulted in a plain

²³ Cass. Dio 75[74].2.2 πρώτος μέντοι αὐτὸς τὸν νόμον τουτονὶ παρέβη καὶ οὐκ ἐφύλαξε, πολλοὺς ἀνελών· καὶ γὰρ καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ Σόλων ὁ Ἰούλιος, ὁ καὶ τὸ δόγμα τοῦτο κατὰ πρόσταξιν αὐτοῦ συγγράψας, οὐ πολλῶ ὕστερον ἐσφάγη. καὶ πολλὰ μὲν ἡμῖν οὐ καταθύμια ἔπραττεν.

²⁴ Cass. Dio 75[74].6-8; *HA, Sev.* 8-9; Birley 2000, 108-14.

²⁵ *HA, Sev.* 10.1-3.

²⁶ See Graham 1978 and Birley 2000, 124-5 for an accounting of the size of the respective armies. The battle took place February 19, 197 CE.

strewn with Roman corpses and had caused Rome's power to decline (76[75].7.1-2). Severus had Albinus' head sent to Rome and put up on a pole for display, an action that Dio says shows that Severus was in no way a good leader.²⁷ Importantly, Dio states that he is providing details of what really happened, not the version of events that Severus himself had published (76[75].7.3). Severus' actions in the Senate would be just as astonishing. He claimed to be the son of Marcus Aurelius and the brother of Commodus, whom he was now deifying despite having reviled him previously (76[75].7.4).

The mention of Marcus Aurelius in this passage is intriguing, as the entire episode recalls the revolt of Avidius Cassius. Both are examples of civil war, and in Dio's telling Marcus succeeded where Severus failed. Facing the threat from Cassius in Syria, Marcus gave a speech to his soldiers in which he bewailed the evils of war (72[71].24.1).²⁸ He was committed to doing what was best for the state, even if that meant turning over power to Cassius (72[71].24.4). His goal was to forgive Cassius of his folly, and he worried that the opportunity to do so might be taken away by Cassius' death (72[71].26.1-2). In a pointed conclusion, Marcus ends his speech thus: "For that would be the one profit I could derive from our present ills, if I could settle this affair well and show to all mankind that there is a right way to deal even with civil wars". As it turns out, Cassius was soon killed, and his head was cut off and saved for Marcus' review. Marcus, however, refused to look at the severed head and had it buried instead (72[71].27.2-3¹, 72[71].28.1).

Marcus' assertion that there was a "right way" to end civil war hardly finds a correspondence with Severus' behaviour in his own civil wars. As we have seen, Severus' war with Albinus was hardly for the benefit of the state; as Dio puts it, "thus Severus conquered; but the Roman power suffered a severe blow, inasmuch as countless numbers had fallen on both sides".²⁹ His behaviour continued to di-

²⁷ Cass. Dio 76[75].7.4. *HA, Sev.* 11.6-9 is more explicit about the mutilation of the corpse, claiming that Severus had the half-dead Albinus beheaded, the head sent to Rome, and the body placed outside his house, so that he might ride over it with his chariot. It also reports an alternate tradition that the bodies of Albinus, his wife, and children were thrown into the Rhone.

²⁸ Cass. Dio 72[71].24.1 πῶς γὰρ οὐ δεινὸν πολέμοις ἡμᾶς ἐκ πολέμων συμφέρεσθαι; πῶς δ' οὐκ ἄτοπον καὶ ἐμφυλίῳ συμπλακῆναι; A speech on this occasion is also mentioned by the *Historia Augusta* and attributed to Marius Maximus (*HA, Marcus* 25.10). The details, however, differ. The speech recorded by Maximus is said to have been delivered by Marcus Aurelius to his friends, and in this speech Marcus is said to have called the people of Antioch rebels, despite having pardoned them publicly. The difference in accounts of the speech is interesting. It might be that Dio and Marius Maximus included two different speeches, but it may also be that Dio used the occasion to highlight a theme (civil war) that runs through his work and also to further elevate Marcus' character.

²⁹ Cass. Dio 76[75].7.1 ὁ μὲν δὴ Σεουήρος οὕτως ἐνίκησεν, ἡ δὲ δύναμις ἢ τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἰσχυρῶς ἔπταισεν ἅτε ἀμφοτέρωθεν ἀναριθμήτων πεσόντων. On Severus' lack of clemency, see Rantala 2016, 168-70.

verge from Marcus', particularly with regard to his treatment of Albinus, who had died by suicide. Dio reports:

Cass. Dio 76[75].7.3-4 ἰδὼν δ' οὖν τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ, καὶ πολλὰ μὲν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς πολλὰ δὲ τῇ γλώττῃ χαρισάμενος, τὸ μὲν ἄλλο ριφῆναι ἐκέλευσε, τὴν δὲ κεφαλὴν ἐς τὴν Ῥώμην πέμψας ἀνεσταύρωσεν. ἐφ' οἷς δῆλος γενόμενος ὡς οὐδὲν εἶη αὐτοκράτορος ἀγαθοῦ, ἔτι μᾶλλον ἡμᾶς τε καὶ τὸν δῆμον, οἷς ἐπέστειλεν, ἐξεφόβησεν· ἄτε γὰρ παντὸς ἤδη τοῦ ὀπλισμένου κεκρατηκῶς ἐξέχεεν ἐς τοὺς ἀνόπλους πᾶν ὅσον ὀργῆς ἐς αὐτοὺς ἐκ τοῦ πρὶν χρόνου ἠθροίκει.

The emperor, after viewing the body of Albinus and feasting his eyes upon it to the full, while giving free rein to his tongue as well, ordered all but the head to be cast away, but sent the head to Rome to be exposed on a pole. As this action showed clearly that he possessed none of the qualities of a good ruler, he alarmed both us and the populace more than ever by the commands that he sent; for now that he had overcome all armed opposition, he was venting upon the unarmed all the wrath that he had stored up against them in the past.

It is therefore striking to see Severus in this chapter invoke Marcus as a model, since reports that at this time Severus adopted himself into the Antonine line, with Marcus as his father and Commodus as his brother, an action that Dio says shocked the senators (76[75].7.4).

Other models are explicitly evoked in the following sentence. Dio paraphrases Severus' speech to the Senate on this occasion, noting that "he praised the severity and cruelty of Sulla, Marius and Augustus as the safer course and deprecated the mildness of Pompey and Caesar as having proved the ruin of those very men".³⁰ These figures of course feature prominently in Dio's earlier narrative, especially Sulla, famously known for his cruelty.³¹ Severus' misunderstanding here, however, has to do with the figure of Augustus. Although Augustus might have had a reputation for cruelty in his earlier career, his character is transformed in 4 CE, when he takes advice from Livia on how to deal with conspirators. Livia advocates adopting a stance of clemency as an expedient measure, and this change in Augustus comes as part

³⁰ Cass. Dio 76[75].8.1 καὶ τὴν μὲν Σύλλου καὶ Μαρίου καὶ Αὐγούστου αὐστηρίαν τε καὶ ὠμότητα ὡς ἀσφαλεστέραν ἐπαινῶν, τὴν δὲ Πομπηίου <καὶ> Καίσαρος ἐπιείκειαν ὡς ὀλεθρίαν αὐτοῖς ἐκείνοις γεγεννημένην κακίζων.

³¹ For an analysis of the figure of Sulla in Dio's history, see Urso 2016, Berdowski 2020. See also Osgood 2020, 318-20 for this speech's ability to recall the one delivered by Julius Caesar at 43.15-18.

of a longer transformation of his character throughout Dio's narrative.³²

Severus does not seem to understand this change, as he places Augustus in a category of those who preferred cruelty. This is an important misunderstanding, because it is at this point that we should begin to see Severus' character transform. He has defeated his rivals, just as Augustus vanquished Mark Antony, Lepidus, and Sextus Pompeius, and he has securely placed himself upon the throne. Severus instead chooses to model himself on the figures of Sulla and Marius, known for their cruelty in Dio and elsewhere. But he also misconstrues Dio's message that civil wars were at times necessary, but that it is the behaviour of the *princeps* in their aftermath that is crucial to putting the state on secure footing.³³

Another point to be made here is the connection to the treatment of Albinus, discussed above. This decapitation and display of Albinus' severed head in the Forum re-activates for the reader several earlier episodes from the history, which Lange (2020, 192) has recently suggested form a "topos of internecine conflict in Dio". Indeed, it connects directly to the civil wars of the Late Republic, when decapitation and display were practically regular occurrences.³⁴ In the Albinus episode, Dio implicitly compares the actions of Severus to those of the Late Republic dynasts, recounted in earlier books. It is therefore all the more shocking to see Severus explicitly associate himself with these characters, in his citation of his favoured dynasts of those civil wars. The explicit mention of Sulla, Marius, and Augustus puts even more focus on Severus' failures: he overtly demonstrates his knowledge of the Roman past, but does so in a perverse way that demonstrates his imperfect understanding of Roman history.

5 Septimius Severus and Hereditary Succession

The question of the passage of power from one emperor to the next was an important issue for historians of the Roman principate, including Dio. Earlier in his history Dio had shown his preference for adoptive succession, specifically at the adoption of Trajan by Nerva and in the speech on adoptive succession that he puts into the mouth

³² This speech of Livia to Augustus on clemency has been extensively commented upon; for references, see Allen 2020, 46 fn. 1. Allen 2020, 53-6 also discusses the transformative nature of this exchange, as a way for Augustus to move beyond the violence of the Late Republic. Burden-Strevens (2020, 187-90) notes the incongruity of Livia's description of Augustus' reign, as more in line with Dio's depiction of the proscriptions under Sulla or the triumvirs. Severus here seems to believe in this crueler version of Augustus' reign, or at least prefers to align himself with the *princeps*' actions as a triumvir.

³³ Scott 2020, 345-8.

³⁴ E.g., fr. 102.8-9, fr. 109, 37.40, 47.3, 47.49 (all discussed in Lange 2020).

of Hadrian.³⁵ With two sons Severus was in some ways bound to pass power to them. Yet Dio is clear that Severus had a negative example of this action to learn from, namely in the passage of power from Marcus Aurelius to Commodus.

In his depiction of Marcus, Dio shows an emperor who recognized the shortcomings of his son and attempted to compensate for them. In his final comment on Marcus, Dio writes:

Cass. Dio 72[71].36.4 ἐν δ' οὖν τοῦτο ἐς τὴν οὐκ εὐδαιμονίαν αὐτοῦ συνηέχθη, ὅτι τὸν υἱὸν καὶ θρέψας καὶ παιδεύσας ὥς οἶόν τε ἦν ἄριστα, πλεῖστον αὐτοῦ ὅσον διήμαρτε. περὶ οὗ ἤδη ῥητέον, ἀπὸ χρυσῆς τε βασιλείας ἐς σιδηρᾶν καὶ κατιωμένην τῶν τε πραγμάτων τοῖς τότε Ῥωμαίοις καὶ ἡμῖν νῦν καταπεσοῦσης τῆς ἱστορίας.

Just one thing prevented him from being completely happy, namely, that after rearing and educating his son in the best possible way he was vastly disappointed in him. This matter must be our next topic; for our history now descends from a kingdom of gold to one of iron and rust, as affairs did for the Romans of that day.

Marcus' plan, aside from educating Commodus well, was to surround his son with advisors and guardians, many of whom were drawn from "the best men in the Senate" (τοὺς κρατίστους τῶν βουλευτῶν, 73[72].1.2). Commodus, however, rejected these men, preferring a life of luxury in Rome. In this brief overview of the passage of power from Marcus to Commodus, we can see Dio attempting to put Marcus in the best possible light and blaming Commodus for any of his own failings.

When we get to the case of Septimius Severus, the situation is quite different. Commodus' reign had been a disaster, and the failure of hereditary succession ought to have been clear, as they in fact were to Severus, at least in Dio's telling. During Severus' British campaign, Dio reports that Caracalla attempted to murder his father (77[76].14.4). Severus later confronted Caracalla in private, and to this scene Dio appends this comment:

Cass. Dio 77[76].14.7 τοιαῦτα εἰπὼν ὅμως οὐδὲν δεινὸν αὐτὸν ἔδρασε, καίπερ πολλάκις μὲν τὸν Μάρκον αἰτιασάμενος ὅτι τὸν Κόμμοδον οὐχ ὑπεξεῖλε, πολλάκις δὲ καὶ αὐτὸς τῷ υἱεῖ ἀπειλήσας τοῦτο ποιήσῃν. ἀλλ' ἐκεῖνα μὲν ὀργιζόμενος ἀεὶ ποτε ἔλεγε, τότε δὲ φιλότεκνος μᾶλλον ἢ φιλόπολις ἐγένετο· καίτοι καὶ τὸν ἕτερον ἐν τούτῳ παῖδα προέδωκε, σαφῶς εἰδὼς τὰ γενησόμενα.

³⁵ Madsen 2016, 152. For a less positive interpretation of this speech, see Davenport; Mallan 2014.

Though he spoke in this fashion, he nevertheless did Antoninus no harm, and that in spite of the fact that he had often blamed Marcus for not putting Commodus quietly out of the way and that he had himself often threatened to act thus toward his son. Such threats, however, were always uttered under the influence of anger, whereas on the present occasion he allowed his love for his offspring to outweigh his love for his country; and yet in doing so he betrayed his other son, for he well knew what would happen.

This is a chilling passage. For our purposes, Dio makes it clear that Severus understood the negative example set by Marcus, yet chose to follow it anyway, even if it meant destruction both for the state and for his son, Geta. We should pair this passage with Severus' final words to his sons, which are both deeply ironic and impressively prescient: "Be harmonious, enrich the soldiers, and scorn all other men" (ὁμονοεῖτε, τοὺς στρατιώτας πλουτίζετε, τῶν ἄλλων πάντων καταφρονεῖτε, 77[76].15.2).³⁶

In Dio's account, the first precept is almost immediately broken, as Geta is murdered by his brother just a few chapters later (78[77].2.3-4). The second and third imperatives, however, are picked up almost as quickly, as we soon find Caracalla in the praetorian camp exclaiming, "Rejoice, fellow-soldiers, for now I am in a position to do you favours" (78[77].3.1).³⁷ It is not necessary here to provide specifics on the evils of Caracalla's reign, as Dio devotes practically his entire narrative of book 78[77] to them. It will be worthwhile, however, to look briefly at some of the models of rule that Caracalla took up.

The most prominent is his imitation of Alexander, but Dio also notes Caracalla's emulation of the cruelty of Sulla (78[77].13.7).³⁸ The example of Sulla is striking here, since we saw it invoked earlier by Severus. Severus, however, paired Sulla with Marius and Augustus, while here we have Caracalla limiting the model to the example of cruelty *par excellence*, thus essentially boiling down the model to its very essence. As for Alexander, Millar's (1964, 151) point is important, that *imitatio Alexandri* was not new to Rome, but the lengths to

³⁶ We might also note the irony that Severus claimed to be the brother of Commodus, as noted above, yet here treats him as an unworthy ruler.

³⁷ For another example of enriching the soldiers and scorning everyone else, see 78[77].9.1-7, 78[77].10.1, 4, 78[77].24.1.

³⁸ For the imitation of Alexander, see 78[77].7-9; 18.1; 22.1; 79[78].19.2, as well as Hdn. 4.8.1-3, 6-9; *HA, Car.* 2.1-2. Caracalla's imitation of Alexander and Sulla has recently been analyzed by Zanin 2020, who concludes that Caracalla adopted these *personae*, inherited to some extent from his father, as a means of turning away from the senatorial elite and toward his provincial constituencies.

which Caracalla took left him open to Dio's "hatred and mockery".³⁹ Furthermore, Caracalla used it as a pretext for war against Parthia, when he asked for Artabanus' daughter in marriage, in what must have been an imitation of Alexander's marriage to the daughter of Darius.⁴⁰ Dio considered this campaign barely worthy of record (79[78].1.3).

The failure of hereditary succession could be extended beyond Caracalla to the remainder of the Severan dynasty.⁴¹ The point to be made now is that Severus' decision to pass power to his sons went against the lessons of the past, and his prescriptions for their success, namely that they enrich the soldiers, demonstrates the shifts in power that began under Severus and would continue later. Caracalla, in turn, shows even less care in choosing his models, opting for an overdone version of Alexander and the cruelty of Sulla. His reign proves both the failure of hereditary succession and the misunderstanding of good examples for emulation.

6 Macrinus and Elagabalus, Between Septimius Severus and Caracalla

Macrinus came to power after the murder of Caracalla and had to consider, quickly, his strategy for self-presentation.⁴² As a former praetorian prefect and the first equestrian emperor, his rule needed an infusion of legitimacy. He was far from Rome and amongst a number of legions that Caracalla had assembled for his Parthian campaign. His solution to this problem was to connect himself to Septimius Severus, while at the same time at least partially effacing the memory of Caracalla.

Dio reports that, in his first missive to the Senate, Macrinus gave himself an expansive titulature: "And in this letter he subscribed himself Caesar, emperor, and Severus, adding to the name Macrinus the titles Pius, Felix, Augustus, and proconsul, without waiting for any vote on our part, as would have been fitting".⁴³ The last part of this sentence is interesting, not only because Macrinus was bypass-

³⁹ See also Mallan 2017, 134-6, 144 for Caracalla's "misguided emulation" of Alexander, along with the similar comments by Carlsen 2016, 328. For a fuller analysis of the *imitatio*, see Baharal 1994.

⁴⁰ Cass. Dio 79[78].1.1; Hdn. 4.10.1-2. Meckler 1994, 31.

⁴¹ See Madsen 2016 for further analysis.

⁴² For the story, see Cass. Dio 79[78].4-6, Hdn. 4.12-13; *HA, Car.* 7; *Macr.* 4.7-8.

⁴³ Cass. Dio 79[78].16.2 ἐνέγραψεν δὲ ἐν τῇ ἐπιστολῇ Καίσαρα θ' αὐτὸν καὶ αὐτοκράτορα καὶ Σεουήρον, προσθεὶς τῷ Μακρίνου ὀνόματι καὶ εὐσεβῆ καὶ εὐτυχῇ καὶ Αὔγουστον καὶ ἀνθύπατον, οὐκ ἀναμένων τι, ὥς εἰκὸς ἦν, παρ' ἡμῶν ψήφισμα.

ing the Senate, but because he seems to have assumed these titles almost immediately upon his proclamation as Augustus in the East. The Senate in turn elevated his son Diadumenian to patrician status and gave him the titles of *princeps iuventutis* and Caesar (79[78].17.1). The Senate further voted Macrinus a horserace to celebrate his *dies imperii*, but this Macrinus refused. The reason is important: he had arranged for his *dies imperii* to align with the birthday of Septimius Severus, and thus claimed that the event had already been appropriately celebrated.

Macrinus' associations with Septimius Severus, made from the very outset of his reign, would continue. Facing a fiscal crisis, Macrinus decided to reduce military pay, taking care to do so only for new recruits. Macrinus leaned on the authority of Severus, making the reduction only to the levels set by him (and thus negating the increase in pay instituted by Caracalla) (79[78].28.3). Dio approved of this change and added that Macrinus was hoping that the compromise would keep the soldiers from revolting. This seems to have worked at first, but, as Dio notes, the massing of troops in the East was dangerous (79[78].29.1-2) and the situation was worsened by the rebellion of Elagabalus, who, unlike Macrinus, preferred to tie his cause to the legacy of Caracalla, going so far as to pose as his son.⁴⁴

The trap in which Macrinus was caught is summarized neatly by Dio a few chapters later, when he recounts another letter to the Senate:

Cass. Dio 79[78].36.2-3 καὶ ἵνα γέ τις ἄλλα ὅσα παρά τε τοῦ Σεουήρου καὶ τοῦ υἱέος αὐτοῦ πρὸς διαφθορὰν τῆς ἀκριβοῦς στρατείας εὕρηντο παραλίπη, οὔτε δίδοσθαι σφισι τὴν μισθοφορὰν τὴν ἐντελὴ πρὸς ταῖς ἐπιφοραῖς, ὥς ἐλάμβανον, οἷόν τε εἶναι ἔφη (ἐς γὰρ ἑπτακισχιλίας μυριάδας ἑτησίους τὴν αὔξησιν αὐτῆς τὴν ὑπὸ τοῦ Ταραύτου γενομένην τείνειν) οὔτε μὴ δίδοσθαι.

And, to omit a recital, he said, of all the many means devised by Severus and his son for the undermining of military discipline, it was impossible, on the one hand, to give the troops their full pay in addition to the donatives that they were receiving (for the increase in their pay granted by Tarautas [Caracalla] amounted to two hundred and eighty million sesterces annually), and impossible, on the other hand, not to give it.

This brief excerpt shows not only the tension between the methods of Severus and those of his son, but also the overall theme of military

⁴⁴ Cass. Dio 79[78].31.3; see also Hdn. 5.3.10 and *HA, Hel.* 2.1-4; cf. *Car.* 9.2, *Macr.* 6.2-9, 9.4.

indiscipline. While we should be circumspect about Dio's opinion of the military given his senatorial disposition, he highlights the rise of the military's influence that brought Severus to power and maintained the position of his dynasty.⁴⁵

Macrinus was soon at war with Elagabalus, who would eventually defeat the equestrian upstart and claim his position as emperor. It is notable that Macrinus and Elagabalus looked only to the recent past for precedents of a ruler to emulate, as can be seen in the discussion above. This amounts to a serious case of amnesia, as there is no appeal to a model emperor such as Augustus or Marcus Aurelius. It is worth noting that this absence is better seen as part of Dio's plan, rather than a shortcoming on Dio's part, whether that be his lack of historical outlook or unsystematic approach to his material. As we have seen thus far, Dio was highly attuned to the repetition of models or *exempla* (good or bad) throughout his history. For the reader of Dio, the lack of an appeal to a model princeps in this situation reverberates throughout the text and punctuates an ending which suggests that a return to a stable form of monarchy under a good ruler is nearly impossible. For Macrinus and Elagabalus, the only models are those of the recent past, a choice which is perhaps driven in part by the elevation of the military as the most important constituency of the monarch. Indeed, the conflict between Macrinus and Elagabalus boils down to a competition between the models of Severus and Caracalla, and more specifically which one paid the soldiers more. Strikingly, this outcome hearkens back to Severus' dying words to his sons (discussed above), that they should enrich the soldiers. But even more importantly, knowledge of Roman history is not properly deployed by the main characters in the story, which calls into question the direction of the monarchy and the needs of Dio's contemporaries to re-learn the lessons of the past.

7 Conclusion: A Changed Monarchy

In the survey above, it is possible to observe a number of occasions when characters from Dio's own period use examples from the past to inform various choices that they have to make, related to such issues as the proper behaviour of the monarch, hereditary succession, or self-representation. These examples exist as a form of self-reference within Dio's work and allow the reader to reflect on the choices that have been made. But we should also acknowledge that the reader's interpretation is in many ways manipulated by Dio, who saw the Roman past as an interlocking sequence of characters, whose actions

⁴⁵ For Dio's view of the military, see De Blois 1997.

and behaviour could re-appear at other times. Thus, there is not just cruel action, but the figure of Sulla who can be called upon again and again as a representation of that character trait. The same could be said for the figure of Augustus, the one who successfully brought Rome out of the period of dynasts and into a stable form of monarchy.

In Dio's own age, we find the figure of Pertinax, whose reign showed that being a reformer like Augustus could not be achieved quickly. Septimius Severus is presented as quite knowledgeable about Roman history, but is unable to properly deploy the lessons of that past. As such, he misunderstands the character of Augustus and incorrectly classes him with Sulla and Marius. Likewise, he mimics Trajan's actions, which Dio saw as positive, but cannot adhere to their underlying principles. His ultimate failure, passing power to his sons, should have been avoided, since he knew the example of Marcus Aurelius and Commodus. Instead, he opted for love of his family over love of his country, even if that meant the sacrifice of his younger son, Geta (77[76].14.7). After the death of Severus, we meet a series of emperors who are unable to look to the Roman past in the same way. Caracalla chose emulation of Alexander and Sulla, while the conflict between Macrinus and Elagabalus was decided through allegiance to either Septimius Severus or Caracalla.

These models, occurring throughout the long expanse of Roman history, could only be recounted properly by someone who had personal experience of Roman politics and a strong acquaintance of the Roman past through intensive study. The contemporary books are a necessary component of the history, in Dio's view, not simply a gratuitous addendum. Dio wrote history during a period of change, one that witnessed the rupture between the seeming peace and stability of the Antonines and the volatility of Commodus and the Severans.⁴⁶ With the contemporary books focused on his own experiences as a Roman senator, Dio connects past and present through the models and *exempla* analyzed above.

These observations raise questions about Dio's thoughts on the utility of history. On the one hand, we might suggest that for Dio, history was the story of decline, as his history proposes a model whereby it is impossible to return to the past – the high point of the Roman monarchy is over, and there is only deterioration. This approach would help to explain the helplessness of the ending of the history, wherein Dio is forced to flee Italy, under threat from the soldiers, so that he might escape, like Hector, "Out of the dust and the slaying

⁴⁶ On the lack of contemporary historiography under the Antonines, see especially Kemezis 2010.

of men and the blood and the uproar".⁴⁷ For Dio, even his preferred mode of government, monarchy, would eventually fail. On the other hand, we might propose a more positive model. Dio was likely aware of the long gap in writing the history of Rome in its entirety. He may have thought this lack of history writing was leading to present ills, that Romans lacked a proper accounting of the past and the way that it informed the present. In this way the characters that have been analyzed above become examples of this sort of failure, while Dio's history becomes the possible remedy. By putting his history out into the world at a low point of Roman history, Dio may have hoped that those who read it would find proper models to emulate and thus appropriately reform Rome's degenerated monarchy.

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⁴⁷ Cass. Dio 80[80].5.3 ἐκ τ' ἀνδροκρασίας ἐκ θ' αἵματος ἐκ τε κυδοιμοῦ (quoting Hom. Il. 11.164).

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In the Imperial books of his *Roman History*, Cassius Dio focuses on individual emperors and imperial institutions to promote a political framework for the ideal monarchy, and to theorise autocracy's typical problems and their solutions. The distinctive narrative structure of Dio's work creates a unique sense of the past and allows us to see Roman history through a specific lens: that of a man who witnessed the Principate from the Antonines to the Severans. When Dio was writing, the Principate was a full-fledged historical fact, having experienced more than two hundred years of history, good and bad emperors, and three major civil wars. This collection of seven essays sets out to address these issues, and to see Dio not as an 'adherent' to or 'advocate' of monarchy, but rather as a theorist of its development and execution.



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